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Being a Game Designer

Voodoo3
High-powered Venom

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DRAKAN

WHEEL OF TIME

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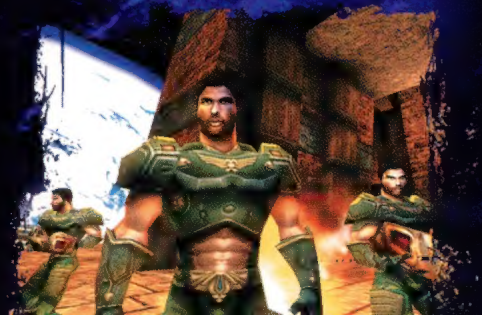

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"The graphics are beautiful, but the gameplay is even more inspired." – Newsweek Online

"Quite possibly the world's most novel first-person shooter. I haven't had this much fun in long, long time." – PC Games

4.5 stars
"One of the freshest experiences in gaming." – Computer Gaming World

9.1 rating
"It's emphasis on stealth, strategy, and ingenuity, coupled with its strong narrative structure and excellent mission design, adds up to a game that's stylish, serious, rewarding, and unique." – Gamespot

Thief captures top ratings

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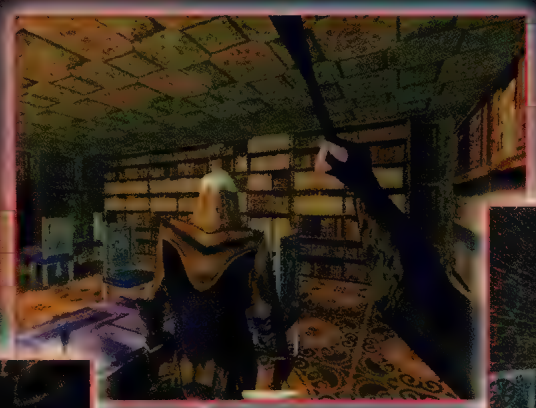
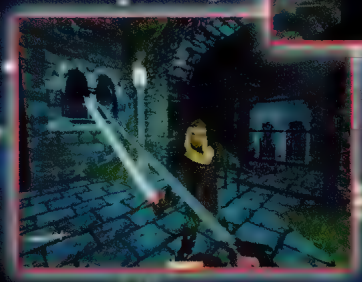


Stealthy Gameplay brings a new dimension to first person action.



Your Arsenal Includes: blackjack, sword, fire arrows, water arrows, rope arrows and more!

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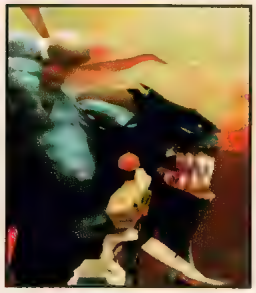
48 

Giants

By Peter Olafson

This is a big one! We take a thorough look at developer Planet Moon's Giants: Citizen Kabuto, including the game's wacky characters and the former MDK team creating this hugely funny action game.

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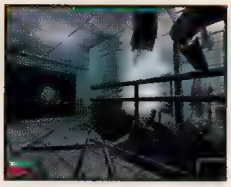
Online-Gaming Services

By Cindy Vanous

Internet gaming services have been around as long as the Net itself, and they used to be the best (and often only) way for gamers to find the perfect fragfest. But with games shipping with built-in multiplay options and with free Net play abounding, what—if anything—do they have to offer the hardcore gamer now?

68 

It's Hell Being A Game Designer

By Joel Strauch

Working 80 hours or more a week. Having ideas shot down like ducks in high season. Fighting the powers-that-be to keep your dream alive. Game design can be hell. We talk to designers from across the industry and bring their stories of tribulation and challenge to you.

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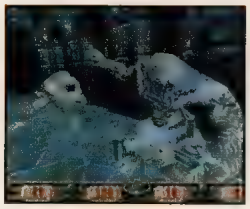
32 

Game Wire

By Willem Knibbe

Press to Play: A Dallas newsweekly's article on strife within ION Storm stirs up a whirlwind...and a response from the game-development house that John Romero built.

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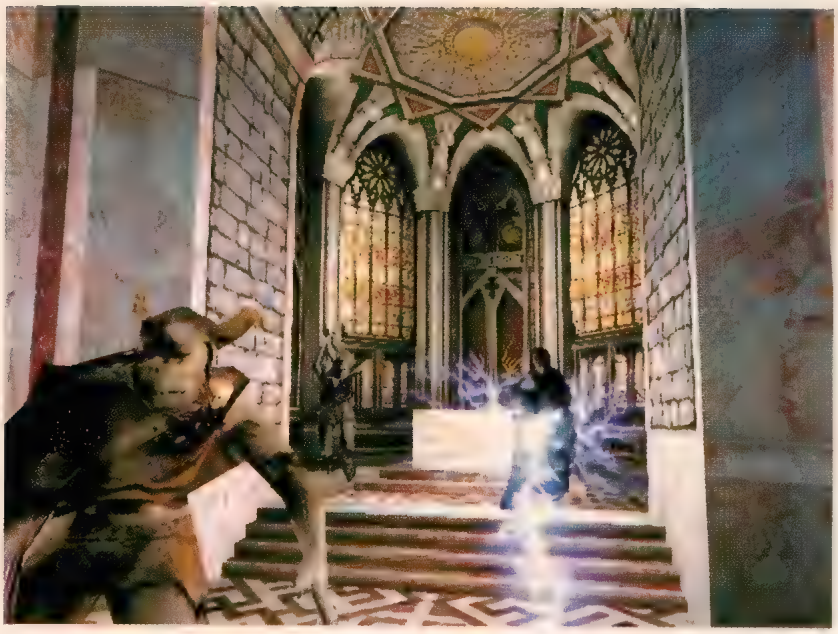

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EDITOR'S NOTE

WILLEM KNIBBE

Welcome to Their Hell

About every third letter we receive asks in one way or another how to get a foot in the game-biz door, how to become an artist or a programmer or a designer. After all, what could be better? It's *games*. It's working with cool, interesting people completely committed to making a game that's fun, involving, innovative, and beautiful.

That's on a good day.

On a bad day, it's haggling with your publisher over the game's name, or firing an incompetent AI programmer, or trying to find that one elusive bug that causes the game to eat your hard drive, or redoing all the textures because the engine was supposed to support 24-bit color but now doesn't.

So rather than do a series on how great it is to be in the business (it is, despite bad days), we're taking a look at what problems and challenges make those in the biz love (or, get theirs, and swear to quit and go program multimedia spreadsheets. We kick off the series on page 68 with a look at the hell it is being a game designer.

One group that isn't headed for spreadsheet programming is the guys at Planet Moon. I've rarely been around a team that seems to work so well together, people who genuinely like each other—and laugh—so much. Their infectious sense of humor spills over into Gunnr: Carrion. Kaburo, which shares some of the ornibulation that made MDK such a blast—maybe because five of the six Moonies worked on it. Now they're preparing C.O.C., a ripping yarn with plenty of frantic action, gibs, and giggles. We traveled to their offices to get a first-hand look at this Eldritch action shooter (page 48), and we're still laughing.

We hope you'll be laughing at Ash flicks and, our new humor column on the back page. See it as a chance to laugh with (others, or at) us as we invite you to send in your own gaming-related jokes, art, and screenshots.

Will you be capturing those screens with a Voodoo2 board? Check out our tech section for an in-depth look at what 3Dfx's chipset has in store, plus looks at Microsoft's DSS 80 speakers, ThrustMaster's new wheel, and Hi-Val's new DVD kit.

And finally, don't miss the reviews—back of course section (page 62) and this month's harvest of games.

William Knibbe

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LIST MANAGEMENT — Kathy King
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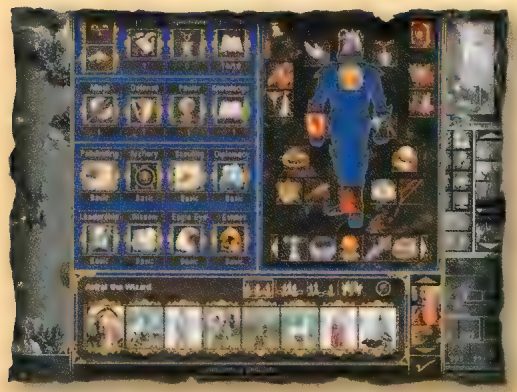

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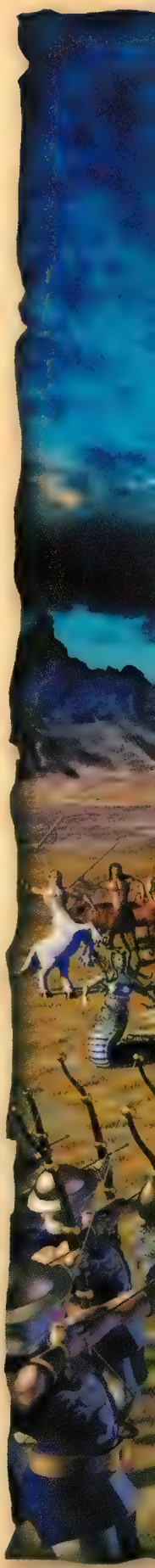

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*September Issue of Computer Gaming World, Top 100 Chart

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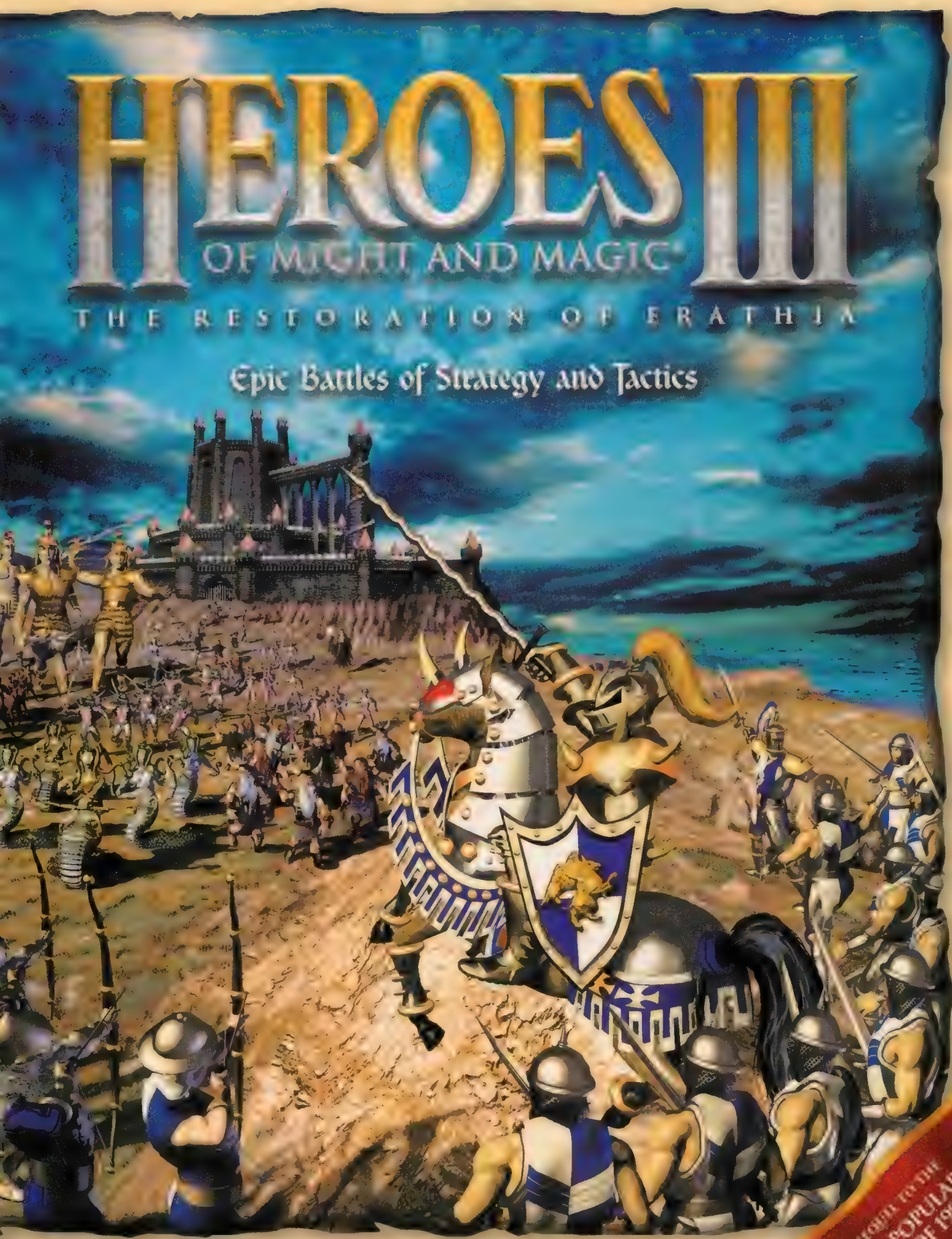

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This month's demo disc is huge! Why? Because it's filled with titles we've all been waiting for. Check it out: We've got WCW Nitro to satisfy wrasslin' fans, the long-awaited sequel Myth II: Soulblighter, the famed Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri, and don't forget our exclusive deathmatch levels for SiN. Oh, and enjoy the hilarious Giants AVI and then check out this issue's exclusive preview of the latest from the team who brought us MDK.

Getting Started

Win 95/98: Place the CD-ROM in the drive. If the CD doesn't start on its own, go to My Computer and double-click on the CD-ROM drive icon. Or Explore the CD-ROM drive and double-click on the PCGames.exe file.

Alternatively, click on the Start button and select Run. Type x:\pcgames.exe (where "x" is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and hit Enter.

Got a question? Need some help? Drop us a line at *cdtech@pcgames.com* and we'll do our best to answer your queries.

EXCLUSIVE! SiN Deathmatch Levels

Our pals Richard "Levelord" Gray and Tom "Paradox" Mustaine from Ritual created exclusive Deathmatch levels just for *PC Games*' readers. Levelord's Keefer map is a great 2- to 4-person fragfest, while Paradox's Desolation level is perfect for an intense one-on-one deathmatch. Get your friends together and enjoy your SiNning!

Demos:

- Aliens vs. Predator
- Close Combat III
- Dark Vengeance
- Imperialism II
- Myth II: Soulblighter
- Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri
- SimCity 3000
- SiN: *PC Games* Exclusive Deathmatch Levels
- WCW Nitro

Patches:

- Caesar III
- Falcon 4.0
- Half-Life
- Links LS 1999
- Myth II

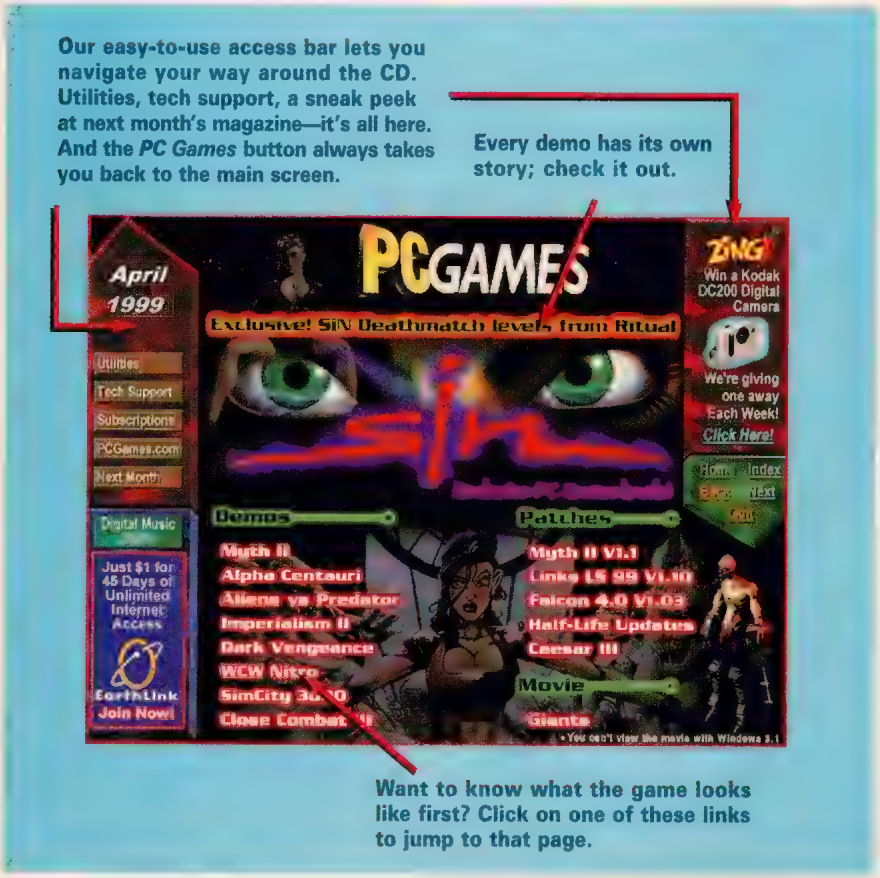
Utilities:

- CuteFTP*
- DirectX 6.0
- GameSpy
- ICQ*
- mIRC*
- NetMeeting
- NetMon
- PingTool
- PKZip
- QuickTime*
- WinZip*
- WS_FTP*

* indicates 16- and 32-bit versions

AVI:

- Giants


Our easy-to-use access bar lets you navigate your way around the CD. Utilities, tech support, a sneak peek at next month's magazine—it's all here. And the PC Games button always takes you back to the main screen.
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MECHWARRIOR3

HAVOC BEGINS
MAY 1999

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SCREENSHOT OF THE DAY

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NEWS FEED

Just the facts: PC Games.com has 'em. Every day, we'll run condensed digests of all the breaking game news, with no PR hype. Just games, info, release dates, and features.

DEMOS

Can't download that big new demo because the publisher's site is overloaded? Check PCGames.com. If it's a big game, we'll mirror the demo to give you a smoother download from our super-fast FTP server.

UPLOAD YOUR QUAKE II SKINS

Hey, we're tired of seeing deathmatch levels full of the same default Quake II guy. We know you have your own skin or model—it's hard to miss that continuous scroll of PCX files that aren't on our server. So we're now starting to let you Quake II fiends upload your favorite skin or model.

To facilitate this, we've set up a special FTP upload site. It's a black hole, so don't expect to download anything or even see what everyone else has uploaded.

This FTP server is for uploading skins and models only. If other junk starts showing up, we'll have to close the FTP server and stop taking skin and model submissions. Here's the submission drill:

Find the Zip archive for either your skin or model files.

(1) To send using an FTP client:

Address: marco.idg-games.com
User: gponlineup
Password: upload

(2) To send using Netscape Navigator 4.0 (Internet Explorer won't have FTP uploading capabilities until IE5):

- Using a utility such as WinZip, zip both PCX files into one archive: e.g.,"lara.pcx" and "lara_i.pcx"
- Start Navigator
- Select "Open Page" from the "File" menu
- Type **ftp://gponlineup:upload@marco.idg-games.com/**
- Select Open
- You'll get a blank screen with "Current directory is/"
- Select "Upload File" from the "File" menu
- Browse to where you saved the Zip archive and select it
- After the file is uploaded, you're done.

For Demos and Patches, go to www.gamedemos.com.

AND ON GAMES.NET

TOP FIVE GAMES OF 1999

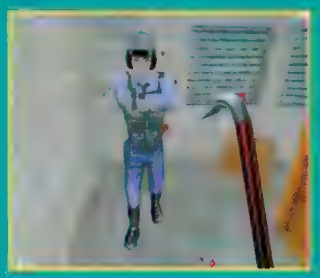
After an in[illegible] year of RTS, FPS, and sports games, Games.net looks deep into its crystal ball in hopes of finding some clue as to what marvels are in store for the next 12 months. We've revisited all the studios, reread all the previews, and reinstalled all the betas. Now we've come up with the world famous Games.net's Top Five Computer Gaming [illegible] to find out which computer games were the best of 1999? We're going to tell you right now.

WWII FIGHTERS STRATEGY GUIDE

The Player is back, bringing you the kind of strategies that can only come from playing WWII Fighters for 200 hours straight. You'll learn everything necessary to take down enemy planes via the Internet or even in single-player mode. So if you're tired of your friends, family, and co-workers making a virtual chump out of you in the European skies, this strategy guide is for you.

THE MOD FILES

David "crt" Wright, known widely for his work on the Rocket Arena Quake mod, is up to his neck in Mod File antics. Sure, the [illegible] government, the cigarette-smoking man, and the PTA are trying to shut the Mod Files down, but we're not going to let them stop us! This month's Mod Files take an in-depth look at the entire mod-making community around games like Unreal, SiN, and Half-Life.



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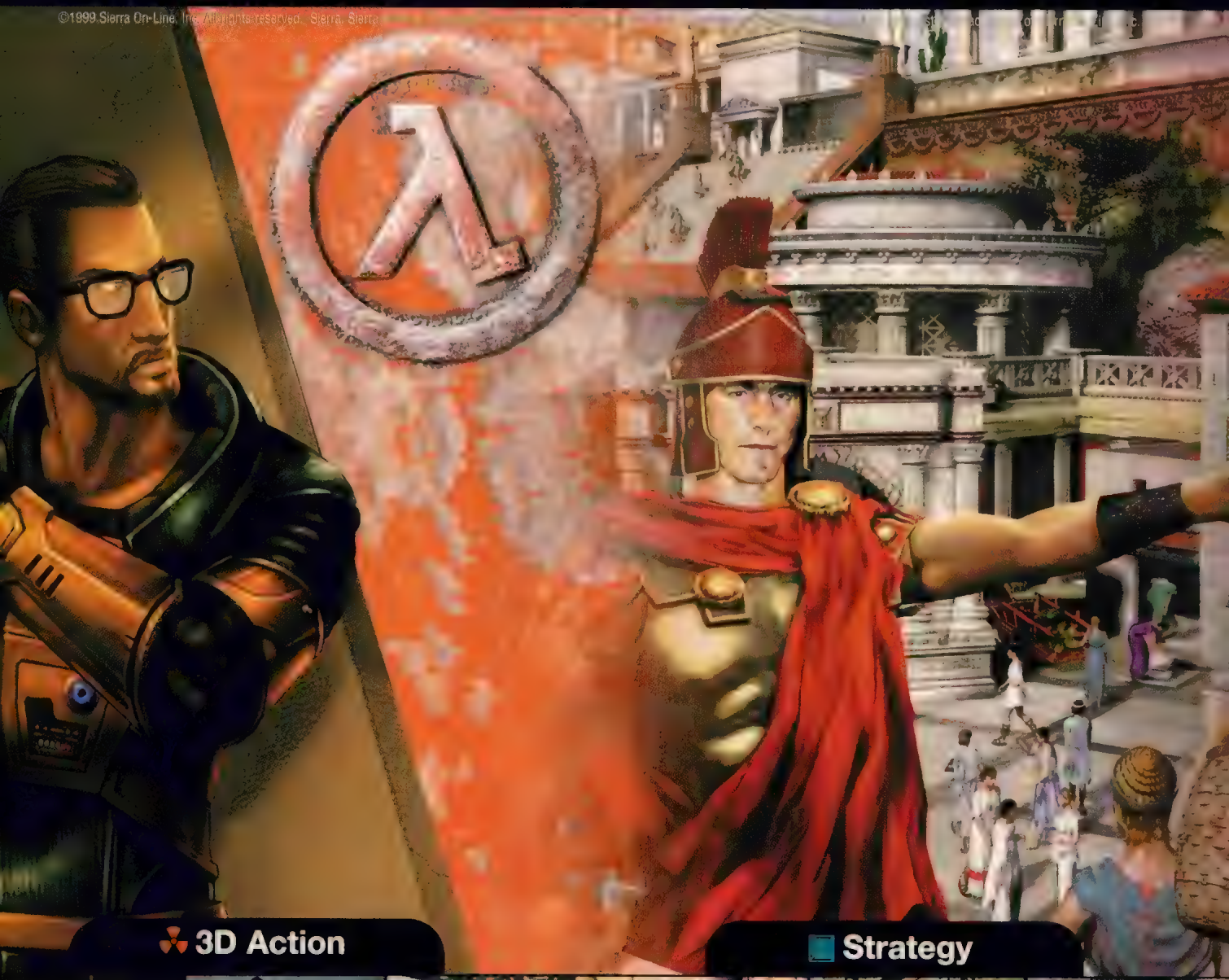

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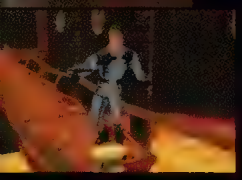

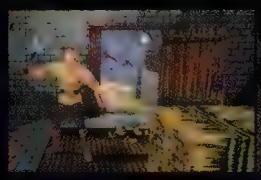

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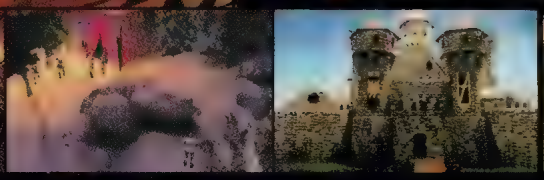

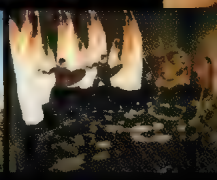

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Personality Contest

GrinR argues in Face-Off (January 1999) that some games need more personality, Half-Life in particular. I agree that personality is important in some games, like the earlier Duke Nukem. You knew what he looked like, and he was created in the two 2D games preceding it. But look at the id line of successful shooters. Did any one of the characters in Doom or Quake have any personality? Name? No. A picture perhaps, and a pretty bad one at that. But YOU make the personality.

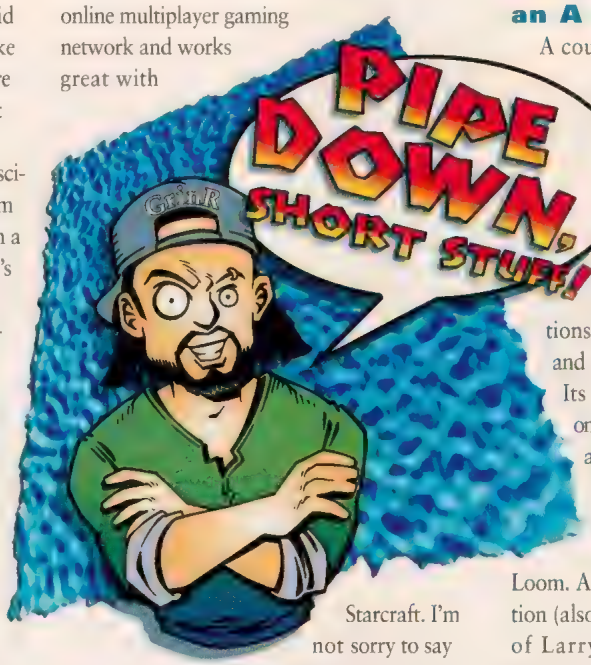
That's what Half-Life sets out to do. If a scientist says hello and you feel like greeting him back, do it yourself! Valve starts you up with a name, age, profession, and, if you take what's on the box into account, a face (there are no mirrors in Half-Life). Now you have a background. Valve wanted to make this a type of interactive movie, and you're the actor. A snide remark from Freeman, even in good context, could easily break the mood, especially if it's contrary to what you're thinking. Besides, when you're in a dark, dank sewer pipe and see a marine open the door, toss in a satchel charge, and close it again, you don't need Gordon to swear and curse for you, believe me. I doubt the appropriate words would be legally available.

I think pre-programmed personality should only apply if the game really needs it—preferably where the hero is either out of the ordinary or has the plot revolving around him in a concentrated way.

SnazzyMan, via email

We Can't Win

I think that you crossed way over the line when you put Total Annihilation over Starcraft in the Best Real-Time Strategy Game category in your 1998 Editors' Choice Awards (February 1999). I have nothing against TA, but when it comes to sheer fun and replayability, Starcraft blows it away. I played TA for about a month and got tired of it, even with multiplay. Even Core Contingency didn't entice me to play more. Then I got Starcraft the first day it was released and have been playing it since. Blizzard's Battle.net is, in my opinion, the best online multiplayer gaming network and works great with Starcraft. I'm not sorry to say that Starcraft could beat TA any day, and with the brand-new expansion pack, I'm certain I'll be playing it for at least a few months to come. I think you guys finally made a mistake.



Jackle, via email

I couldn't believe what I saw. THE most heated debate was between TA and SC?? Starcraft can't even compare to TA. TA has the technology, over 230 units available, 3D units/terrain, 50 single-player campaign missions, sweet explosions, downloadable units, a decent story, and the concept of having a single unit (the Commander) that's the most important and powerful and that controls your entire base. TA goes where no RTS has gone before—Starcraft is too much like all prior RTS games. TA should've won by a long shot.

"]|aaken", via email

What a Difference an A Makes

A couple of issues ago, Peter Olafson, reviewing LucasArts' Star Wars Archives II in End Game, suggested that LucasArts should stop "cannibalizing" recent games and reissue some old favorites. Alas, Mr. Olafson apparently did little research on that topic; LucasArts sells compilations of both their older adventure games and of Larry Holland's WWII flight sims. Its Classic Adventures collection ($19.95, on IBM floppy) contains Zak McKracken and the Alien Mindbenders, Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, The Secret of Monkey Island, Maniac Mansion, and (the best of the lot, IMHO) Loom. And the Air Combat Classics compilation (also $19.95 and on floppy) contains all of Larry Holland's WWII sims—Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe, Battlehawks 1942, and Their Finest Hour: The Battle of Britain—plus expansion sets for TFH and SWOTL.

Josh Martin, via email

This was an editing mistake. Peter's original copy referred to those games not being Archived—note the capital "A"—meaning that they hadn't appeared in the LucasArts Archive series. As Josh notes, some of the titles Peter mentioned were indeed collected on floppy disk some years ago, but not as part of the Archive series. The column as printed, however, turned "Archived" into "archived"—hence the confusion. —Eds.

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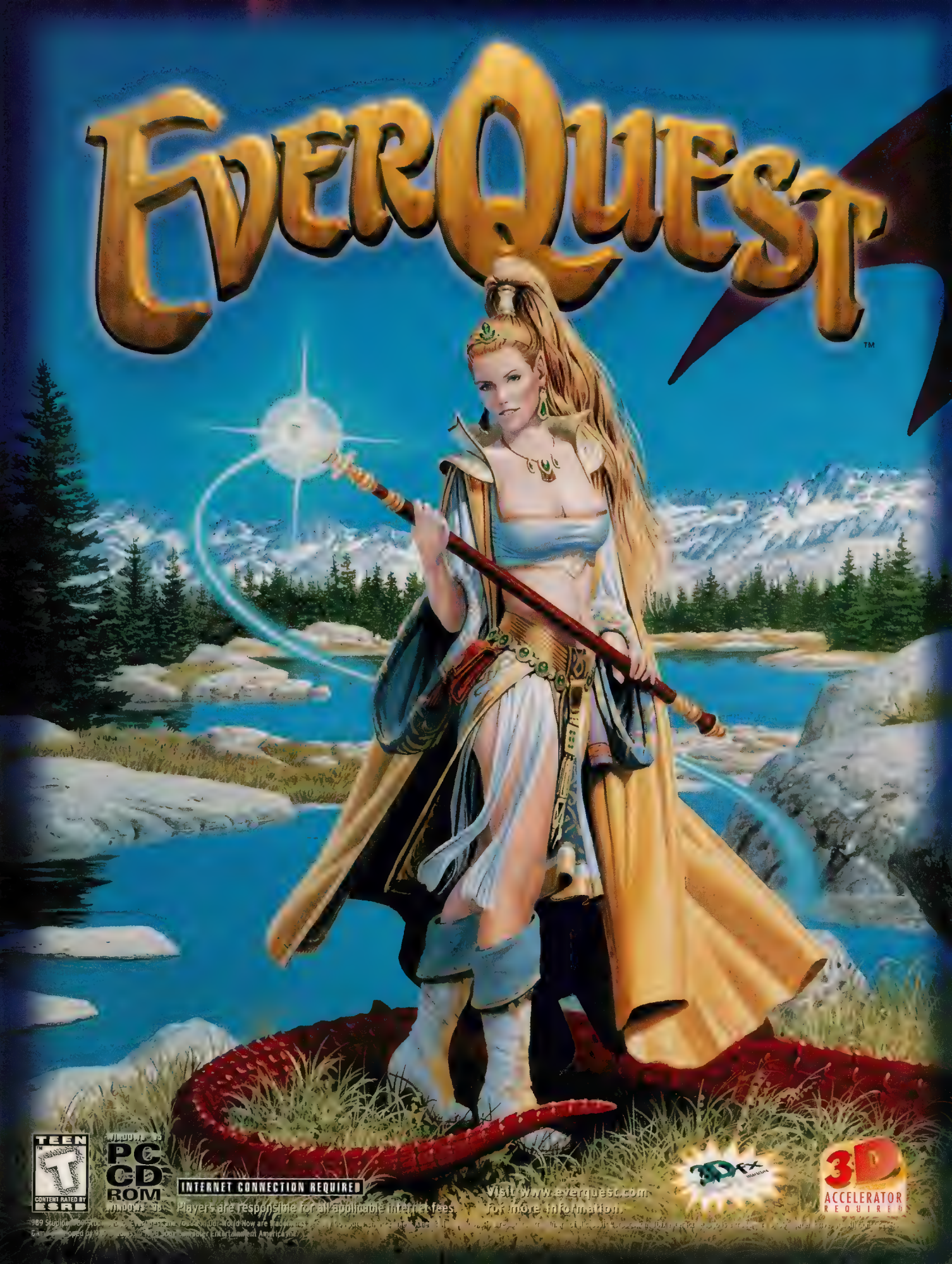
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GAME WIRE

An ION Storm in a Teacup?

By Willem Knibbe

Key figures within the beleaguered ION Storm say the Dallas developer is enjoying smooth sailing.

In the wake of a published report of internal strife, executives asserted in January that the company is financially healthy, that its reported high turnover is a phenomenon common in the games industry, and that cofounder John Romero remains intimately involved in the production of Daikatana.

The high-profile startup has been a source of fodder for print and Web media. The retail performance of its debut release—the 2D real-time strategy game Dominion: Storm Over Gift 3—didn't live up to the hubbub that accompanied ION's launch. Romero's own Daikatana, a first-person shooter with a time-travel story—is already famously late. In November, eight ION employees (including seven members of the Daikatana team) jumped ship and, as Bloodshot Entertainment, went to work on a game for Gathering of Developers—a publisher founded by departed ION cofounder Mike Wilson.

Most recently, in January, ION was the subject of a lengthy feature in the *Dallas Observer* (**www.dallasobserver.com**) that depicted the two-year-old company as a financially unstable combination of back-stabbing cliques and prima donnas where the owners are trying to cash out and employees are trying to find a way to get out.

The article—which in its online version included internal ION email—has created a public-relations nightmare for ION Storm. Fan and game-gossip Web sites, which have always had an eagle eye on ION, have reported its allegations, ION executives' responses, and the subsequent subpoenaing of writer Christine Biederman in an effort to find out where she obtained the email.

While ION Storm wouldn't address the article on a point-by-point basis, Romero and CEO Todd Porter, in separate interviews, did speak to some issues raised in the piece.

The *Observer* reported that more than half the company's 85 employees have left over the past year, with two original owners (Wilson and former COO Bob Wright) being forced out for various reasons. (A former ION Storm employee told *PC Games* that more than 70 employees have left ION in the last year.)

If the time-traveling, four-episode Daikatana is great, will gamers care about ION's inner workings?

Wright has filed a wrongful-termination lawsuit that was scheduled to go to trial February 15.

ION officials wouldn't comment on the lawsuit. However, while Porter couldn't confirm the number of departures, he says turnover is common in the games industry, especially now that Dallas is no longer a "two–game-company city. It's more like a 20–game-company city." Positions have been filled quickly, he says, and the company now has 83 employees. Among them is Chris Klie, a former LucasArts level designer, recently hired along with others to replace the folks who left the Daikatana team (see "D'oh-katana," February, page 65).

The *Observer* reported that ION Storm has gone through $26 million in advances from Eidos, is spending $900,000 a month, is searching for more capital, and would need to sell 2.5 million units of Daikatana in order to earn enough to pay back Eidos.

While refusing to discuss specific dollar amounts, Romero says the *Observer* piece was "totally wrong... The money from Eidos was for three games. Daikatana doesn't have to sell 2.5 million units. Say we got $24 million or whatever [from Eidos]. If you sell a million, and sell in at $25 a unit, there's 1 million units of just one game and there's the money we've gotten from Eidos. We've *got* three games, OEMing, console ports—tons of stuff; these games generate tons of revenue. Basically, the people who calculated things don't know how the business runs."

Biederman, the author of the *Dallas Observer* article, begs to differ.

"They're full of crap," she says. "First of all, according to their contract, 60 percent of the sales goes to Eidos [which doesn't apply to the $26 million already owed them]. That leaves [ION Storm] with 40 percent. Then another 7.5 percent goes to id [Software] for the use of their engine. So they get 32.5 percent of that $25 million—a little over $8 million."

Daikatana, a first-person shooter running under the Quake II engine, is now slated for a May release. (At press time, a demo was slated for February release.) Anachronox and Deus Ex, both role-playing games that use the Quake II and Unreal engines, respectively, are scheduled to ship by Christmas.

Porter declined to be specific about financial matters and would only say that "ION's never been in better financial shape than it is today."

The *Observer* reported that Porter pushed hard to acquire Dominion from defunct 7th Level. He thought it would sell a half million, while ION's other owners saw it as a way to "burn an option." (ION's deal with Eidos is for Anachronox, Deus Ex, and Daikatana, and

continued on page 40

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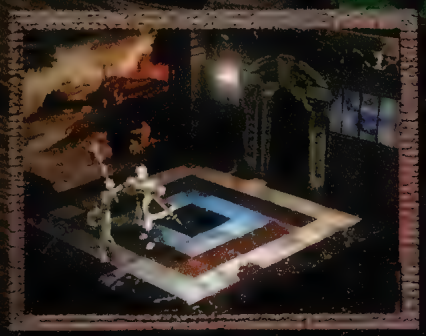

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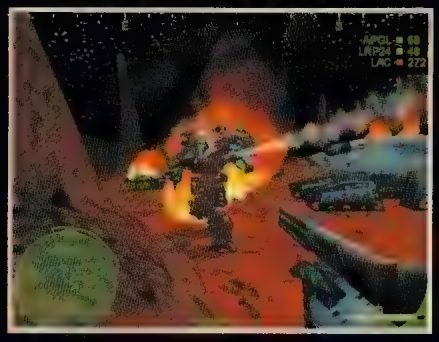

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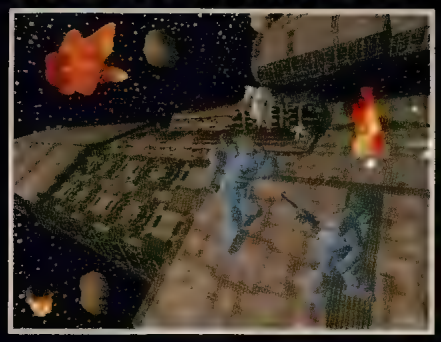

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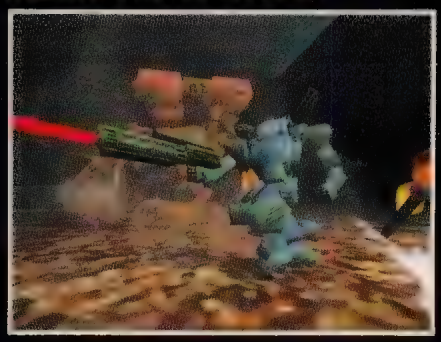

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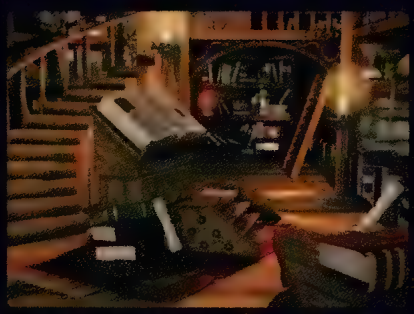

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ION Storm cont.

Eidos holds options on three more games.) The article said Dominion cost ION more than $3 million to acquire and finish and has sold 14,000 units through November 30, according to PC Data.

ION and Eidos say over 100,000 units of Dominion have sold (including international sales). "Obviously I would have liked to see the title go to a half million," Porter says, "but with the OEM deals—the Compaq deal we did do, and they said we didn't—the title will end up being a cash-positive title for us."

Romero admits that his initial thought was to burn an option, which didn't happen, but that he wanted to continue with it anyway because it was Porter's project. "No one's going to tell Tom [Hall] what kind of game to make, or tell me what kind of game to make, and [Porter] wanted to finish it. [I thought] 'OK, let's do that, and at the same time make the publishing engine kind of start up [so we could] get the bugs out of that.'"

The *Observer* reported that ION's owners were negotiating a deal to sell part of their stake in the company to Eidos for $12.5 million, and the article implied ION's partners were more interested in cashing out than making games.

"Eidos has the right and the option at any point to purchase part of ION," Porter says. "It's part of the contract with them. There's no negotiation, renegotiation. They have the option and have always. It's been discussed since the day we signed the deal."

"Why start a big company and then try to cash out?" Romero says. "This company is made up of all game-design people, everyone here makes games, that's why we're here, and we're responsible for a lot of people. Everyone here is having fun making games, so why sell the company? It's a cool life."

Todd Porter

"Selling a piece, that's something we'd talked about," Romero says later. "Whenever you have a publisher dump a large hunk of money, they want a stake in it. Eidos approached us. Eidos approached us, we thought about it and put it off for a while because we wanted to make sure they're a cool company to deal with and see if they're cool enough to sell a piece to."

The *Observer* said Romero maintains rock-star hours, is barely supervising the Daikatana team, and has little input into the game's progress.

"That was such ridiculous s— in the *Observer*, that I'm not here," Romero says. "Everyone gets in at 11 and leaves around midnight or so. I'm usually here til 3 in the morning, about a 16-hour day. It's my game. I'm involved in everything. I'm saying, 'Make that panel come out a little faster and make that rotating thing have this sound effect.' Every little thing in the game. The speed of things, maps, lighting, every little thing."

"All I can say is that his ex-employees have a different version of his work habits," says Biederman.

Romero's challenge now is to make sure Daikatana is a top-notch game. The hope at ION is that the discussions about its internal machinations will fade and, once the company releases a good game, that they'll be replaced with discussions about its games.

John Romero

"I wish people would just pay attention to the games," says Warren Spector, the designer of Deus Ex who's in negotiations to become a part owner. "The constant attention I find amazing. I've got news for you: A lot of stuff people read about in terms of ION Storm goes on in every company. I've worked for five, and the only difference is that people seem to care about what happens internally here, and no one cared at other places."

Joel Strauch contributed to this story.

Starcraft Leads the Pack

Blizzard's Starcraft leads a list of 1998's top-selling games that also includes four hunting sims, two Barbie releases, and a Titanic game—and that finds the five-year-old Myst still hanging on in the No. 3 slot. The PC Data list is based on units sold by 42 retail and mail-order chains that represent more than 80 percent of the U.S. market. *—Peter Olafson*

1. Starcraft (Havas Interactive)
2. Deer Hunter (GT Interactive)
3. Myst (The Learning Company)
4. Microsoft Flight Simulator (Microsoft)
5. Deer Hunter II 3D (GT Interactive)
6. Titanic: Adventure Out of Time (Havas Interactive)
7. Lego Island (The Learning Company)
8. Frogger (Hasbro Interactive)
9. Diablo (Havas Interactive)
10. Age of Empires (Microsoft)
11. Riven: The Sequel to Myst (The Learning Company)
12. Cabela's Big Game Hunter (Activision)
13. Monopoly Game (Hasbro Interactive)
14. Unreal (GT Interactive)
15. Barbie Riding Club (Mattel)
16. Quake II (Activision)
17. Scrabble (Hasbro Interactive)
18. Microsoft Return of Arcade (Microsoft)
19. Rocky Mountain Trophy Hunter (GT Interactive)
20. Barbie Nail Designer (Mattel)

At the Wire

The Ultimate Gaming PC: A Mac?

Steve Jobs has no problem whipping the Mac faithful into a near-religious fervor. At the recent Macworld Expo, Apple's interim CEO incited the throng with promises of a return to the gaming front—aided by none other than id's John Carmack, who announced the simultaneous development of Quake III: Arena on both PC and Mac platforms.

"Quake III: Arena will set new standards for graphics, networking, and gameplay, and the new Macs will be among the best platforms to experience it on," Carmack says.

The new Macintosh G3s come with an ATI Rage 128 preinstalled, which—according to Apple's benchmarking—runs games at higher fps than a PII 450 with a Voodoo2 card.

PC Data reports that Apple's iMac was the No. 1–selling computer between October and December 1998, accounting for 6.2 percent of all sales and 7.2 percent of the dollar volume.

Apple has deals with most of the major gaming vendors to release titles on the Mac platform, including Activision with Heretic II, SiN, and Battlezone; Blizzard with Starcraft; Microsoft/MacSoft with Age of Empires; Red Storm Entertainment/MacSoft with Rainbow Six; Sierra with Quest for Glory V and Caesar III; Gathering of Developers with Railroad Tycoon II and Fly!; and MicroProse/MacSoft with Falcon 4.0.

Another Macworld introduction that turned heads was Connectix's new Virtual Game Station: an emulator that lets gamers run PlayStation titles on iMacs and G3s. The Mac version has shipped, and the company says a PC version is in the works.

One head that turned hard was Sony's. The PlayStation manufacturer filed suit three weeks later, seeking a temporary injunction against sales of the VGS. Sony claims that the software is a violation of the PlayStation's anti-piracy policy. *—Joel Strauch*

Shogo a No Go (Til 2001)

Aztech New Media is developing a Shogo expansion pack called Legend of the Fallen, but don't expect a full-fledged Shogo sequel from Monolith until around Christmas 2001.

Aztech's pack, which should be out in June, will feature six new characters, eight new monsters, eight new weapons, eight new mechs, and 25 missions. The plot involves a suddenly silent mining colony and a deadly new alien race.

The Voodoo Master from Monolith's Sanity.

Meanwhile, the Shogo team is busy developing an undisclosed first-person shooter for GT Interactive.

"It's not anime, and it's not robots, but you'll see the Monolith flair," says spokesperson Paul Butterfield. (It's also not a Blood add-on or sequel, though those are in the works.)

The game should be done this fall—along with Sanity, a Diabloesque game with an isometric, rotatable view—freeing the team to begin the Shogo sequel. The sequel will use LithTech 2.0, a revamped engine that will include advanced features like bump-mapping, curved surfaces, and portal-server technology to let you transparently jump from one multiplayer server to another. *—Willem Knibbe*

Verdu to Head Up Unreal II

Industry veteran Mike Verdu will be lead designer on Legend Entertainment's Unreal II, *PC Games* has learned.

"We're excited," says Verdu, who's also Legend's chairman and co-CEO. "We've got an incredible team."

Unreal II is currently "very much in design," he says. While he wouldn't go into details, he says the game engine will include significant technical improvements which "will enable us to do stuff that people haven't seen. We're looking at a whole new generation of stuff for Unreal II."

It wouldn't be the first time Verdu has surpassed gamers' expectations of a genre. His credits include two early Legend text-and-graphics adventures—based on Frederik Pohl's Gateway novels—that were notable for capturing such un–text-adventurey concepts as a sense of action.

Verdu's last game was Mission Critical, a first-person science-fiction adventure with an immense sense of urgency. (He also co-designed Habitactics, an educational program that teaches a balanced approach to conservation and the environment, for the state of Missouri.)

More recently, Verdu has been serving as executive producer on Legend's Wheel of Time—an Unreal engine–driven action/strategy hybrid due from GT Interactive in spring.

In January, GT announced that it had acquired Legend—who's also developer of the Unreal Levels Pak—for an undisclosed sum. *—Peter Olafson*

A Flag on the Play

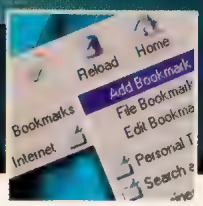
Sierra plucked its Football Pro '99 from retail shelves after ordering what spokesman Ken Schramm referred to as an "unprecedented" recall of the game.

Citing the game's buggy code, Sierra formally apologized for the premature release of the product, admitting that the encroaching end of the pro-football season had influenced its decision to release the title before it was finished. Among the glitches are numerous interface problems, printing disorders, statistical errors, and bugs in the play-design feature.

You can return the game (with the receipt) for a full refund plus a certificate good for one $29.95 Sierra game. Those who wish to keep the game can get a $20 rebate toward the purchase of Football Pro 2000 and a Football Pro Home Team T-shirt. Direct inquiries to 800-757-7707, or visit **www.sierra.com**. *—Dan Morris*

Jamal Anderson will have to wait til next year to Dirty Bird in a Sierra football game.

BOOKMARK THIS



We've gone online to pick the coolest sites on the Web. If you know of a site that belongs here or want to see us add a particular category, drop us a line at *sites@pcgames.com*.

By Danny W. Lam

Site of the Month: Tribesplayers.com

www.tribesplayers.com

If you're like us, you're probably spending an obscene amount of time with Dynamix's latest, Starsiege: Tribes. Check out this great site filled with valuable information. Lost your manual? No problem, it's here. Want to know about skins? They're here, too. What's the story on the Starsiege universe? You've come to the right place to find out. Want to know what Dynamix's Tribes team is working on? Check the site's .plan updates. Nicely done. Congrats to our site of the month!

ACTION

The Blood Shack
www.bloodshack.com

Halflife.net
www.halflife.net

HereticII.com
www.hereticII.com

Sin Post
sin.gamepost.com

Unreal Nation
www.unrealnation.com

RPGs

Baldur's Gate Chronicles
www.bgchronicles.com

Crossroads of Norrath
con.crossroadsrpg.com

DiabloII.com
diabloii.com

EverQuest Evil
members.xoom.com/gromph/

Ice's Ultimate Fallout 2 Page
www.geocities.com/~black-berret/

SIMULATIONS

3D Racing Mania
3dracing.allgames.com

Combatsim.com
www.combatsim.com

H.I.M.O.N.
www.himon.com

MicroWings
www.microwings.com

Sidgames.com
www.sidgames.com

SPORTS

Baseball Sim Central
www.baseballsimcentral.com/index/

Bokkie's Links LS 99 Players Paradise
www.boksoft.com/bokkie/

Digital Sportspage
www.digitalsports.com

The NBA Live Series Center
www.tassoft.com/nbalive/

PC Sports Games.com
www.pcsportsgames.com

STRATEGY

Brood War Dynasty
broodwar.bgames.com

The Empire of Armageddon
empire.topgames.net

RTS Gaming
www.rtsg.com

Strategy Command
www.strategycommand.com

TiberiumSun.com
www.tiberiumsun.com

MISC/UTILITIES

GameGirlz.com
www.gamegirlz.com

GameSpy 3D
www.gamespy.com

Generation 3D Hardware and Gaming
www.gen3d.simplenet.com

ICQ
www.mirabilis.com

The Internet Gaming Guild
www.igg.net

Internet Weather Report
www.internetweather.com

KAHN
www.stargatenetworks.com

KALI
www.kali.com

MAME
mame.retrogames.com

MIRC
www.geocities.com/~mirc/

PingTool
www.pingtool.com

Ringworld
www.webring.org/ringworld/comp/games.html

Tom's Hardware Site
www.tomshardware.com

To see a list of hardware-company URLs for updates and drivers, please visit our Web site at www.pcgames.com/drivers.

Online-Gaming Services

2AM	*www.2am.com*
Battle.net	*www.battle.net*
Bungie.net	*www.bungie.net*
Def-Con	*www.def-con.net*
ENGAGE Games Online	*www.gamesonline.com*
HEAT	*www.heat.net*
iMagic	*www.imagiconline.com*
Internet Gaming Zone	*www.zone.com*
GameStorm	*www.gamestorm.com*
MPG-NET	*www.mpgn.com*
Mplayer	*www.mplayer.com*
NovaWorld	*www.novaworld.com*
TEN	*www.ten.net*
Westwood	*www.westwood.com*
WorldPlay	*AOL keyword: WorldPlay*
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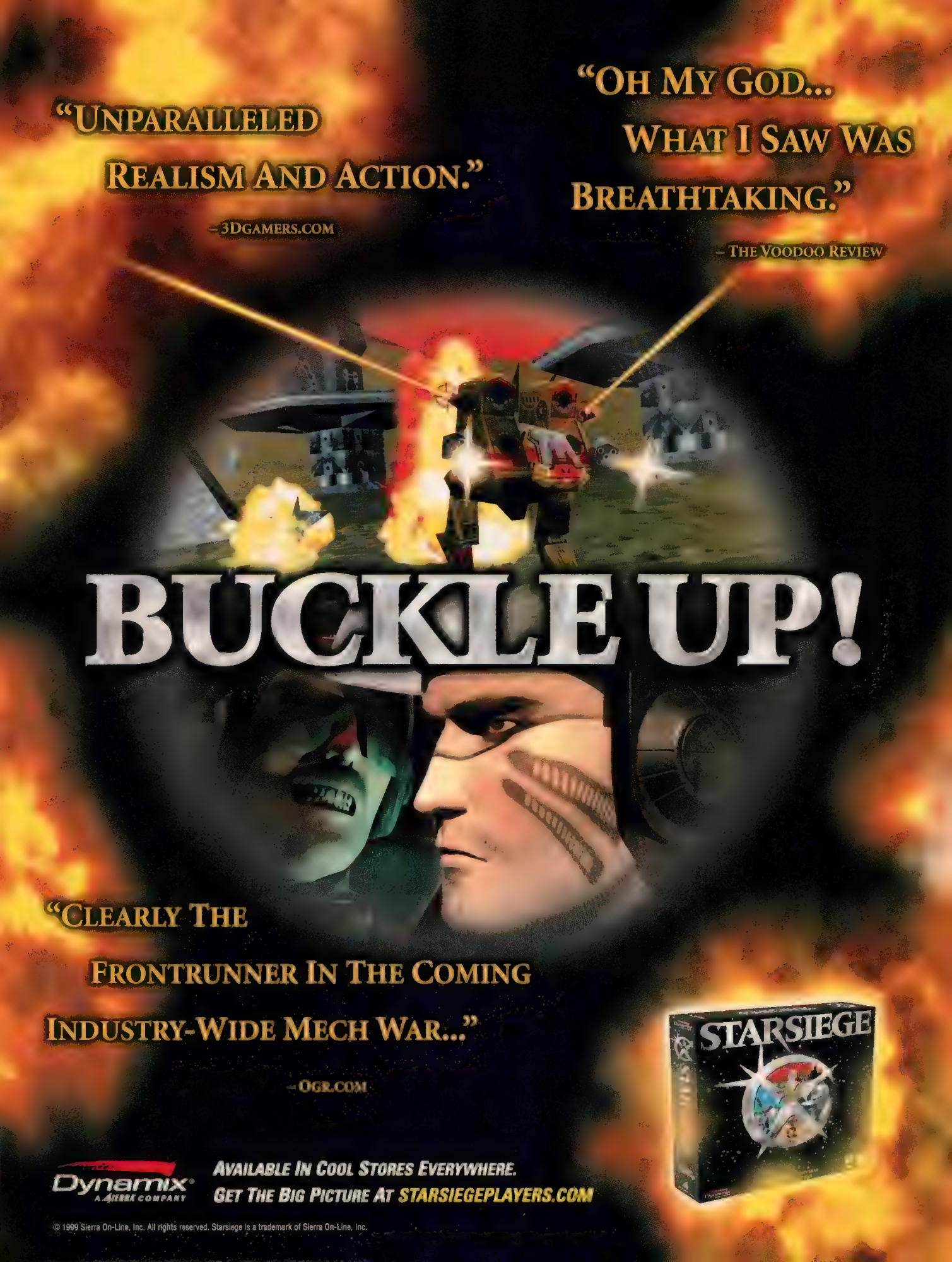
– THE VOODOO REVIEW



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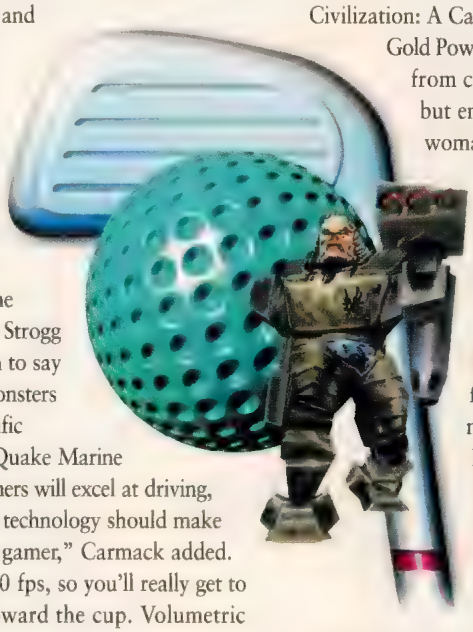
THREE-DOT BUZZ

Say it ain't so: Carmack to abandon first-person shooters

WILLEM KNIBBE

id to Hit the Links

I ran into John Carmack at Macworld after he'd finished showing off Quake III on a G3, and he had some startling news: "id has become too closely associated with first-person multiplayer shooters, and we think it's best for our company to branch out." After Quake III, id will turn its attentions to a crowded genre. "Quake Fore is going to be the world's best PC and Mac golf game." I was dumbfounded, even more so when Carmack prattled on like a PR flak: "Not only can you pick your favorite U.S. course, but we've also hired pro golfer Tom Lehman to create several courses on the Strogg homeworld. Those courses will feature portal technology so that if you're golfing on the Internet, a trip to the clubhouse will teleport you to a different Strogg course on a different server." He went on to say that about 25 of the Quake universe's monsters will be included, and each will have specific strengths and weaknesses. The good ol' Quake Marine will be the most well-rounded, while Gunners will excel at driving, and Vores will be excellent putters. "Our technology should make this game a must-have for every golfer and gamer," Carmack added. "On a dual Voodoo2, it will run at 160 fps, so you'll really get to see each dimple of the ball as it rolls toward the cup. Volumetric fogging, inverse-kinematic animations, specular lightmaps, and real-time tessellation and deformation will make this the most realistic, advanced golf game ever." Still to be decided is the control scheme. Carmack isn't sure if Quake Fore will use the three-click scheme or mouse swing—or neither. Look for Quake Fore "when it's done," Carmack said.



BE LIKE MIKE: This professional PC gaming thing is definitely picking up steam. My Chicago correspondents tell me that Michael Jordan retired from the NBA not to spend time with his family or to work on his golf game, but because he wants to devote himself to his closet hobby: PC gaming. Sources say he plans to compete in the Professional Gamers' League next season and has already installed a T3 in his suburban Chicago home. Here's hoping he's better at fragging than at swinging a bat... Dennis Fong, aka Thresh, wants to prove he's more than a Quake king and has now mastered Reversi and Spades. Both are available on the Internet Gaming Zone, and Thresh is trying to convince Microsoft to host a big-money tournament... Ion Storm CEO Todd Porter used to be a male stripper dancing under the name Preacher Boy... Ripcord is weighing whether to approach Jenny McCarthy or Cameron Diaz for the title role in its planned Space Bunnies Must Die film. The former has Allison's physical attributes, but the latter has box-office draw.

In an unprecedented move, Activision and MicroProse will offer a combined Civilization bundle. Civ II Gold, MicroProse's multiplayer version of the Sid Meier classic, will be packaged with Activision's Civilization: A Call to Power and sold for $69.99 as Civilization II: Gold Power. "Both companies were getting too many returns from confused customers who wanted one of the Civs but ended up with the other," says a MicroProse spokeswoman. "This collaboration between us and Activision is great for everyone. Civ fans get two great games for just a little more than the cost of one, and we save on all those returns." Apparently they invited Firaxis to bundle in Alpha Centauri but were rebuffed. Sid Meier refused to comment.

PRINCESS LARA? Sources close to Eidos confirmed rumors that LucasArts is in the midst of negotiating a unique Tomb Raider licensing deal. LucasArts doesn't want to license the engine—it wants to license Lara because it admires her popularity and wants to use her in its upcoming Star Wars prequel games. It'll be much more than a cameo appearance, too: Lara will take over the Princess Leia role if the matter of her hair can be settled. Eidos wants the familiar swinging ponytail while LucasArts is demanding Leia's traditional buns-on-sides-of-head look... Eidos is so peeved it's taken Ion Storm forever to get Daikatana out the door that it's "re-incentivized" their arrangement, a source in Eidos' financial department says. If Daikatana doesn't ship this May, Romero has to trade in his Ferrari for an SUV and get a buzz cut. "We had to threaten the things he loves most," the source says. "Financial penalties were hardly an effective motivator since Mr. Romero's past remuneration has provided him with significant monetary reserves." I think he means they paid him too much initially, and now John's rich.

Perhaps you'll soon be protecting Princess Lara in a Star Wars universe.

April Fool's! But you knew that from the get-go, right? Well, smarty pants, be the first to tell me which of the above items is real, and you win a copy of Baldur's Gate. Fool me at buzz@pcgames.com.

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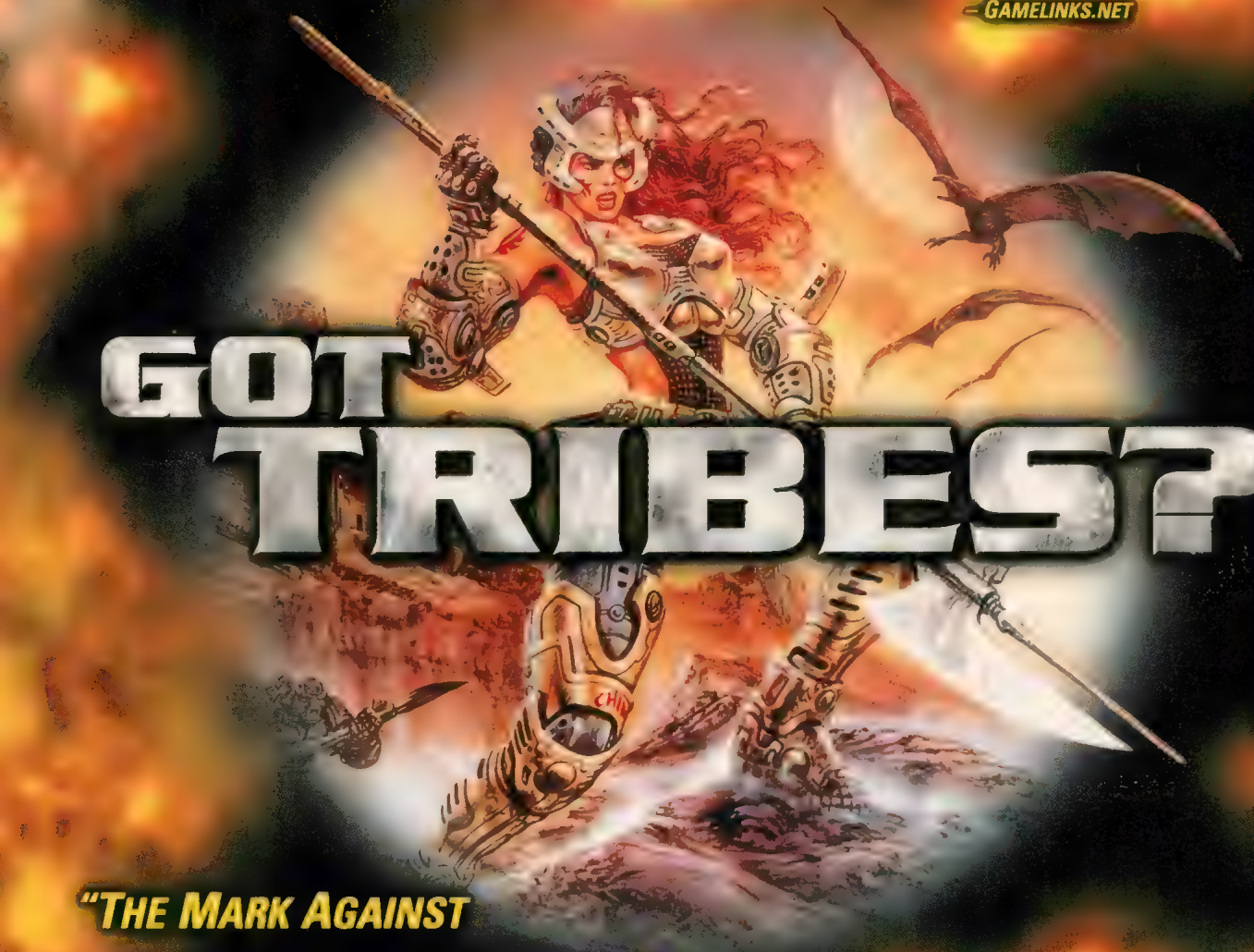

GOT TRIBES?

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– GAMEPOST.COM

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NoEsc

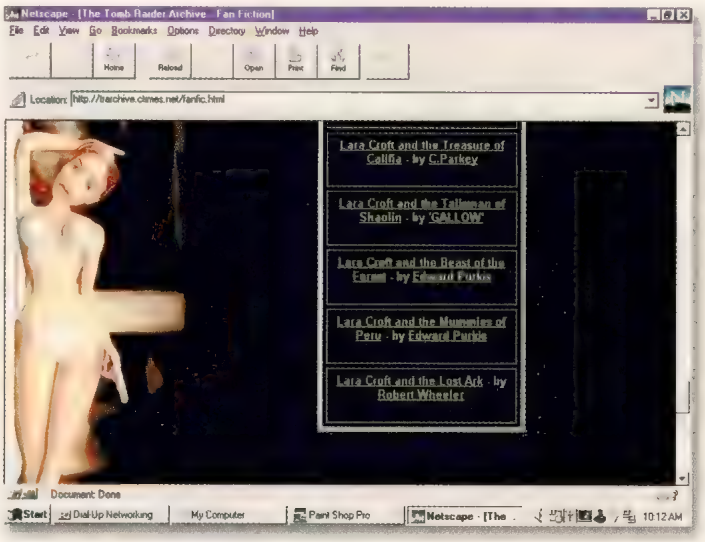
DANIEL MORRIS

...and the further adventures of Lara Croft were coming not from Core Design, but from her fans.

It Was a Dark and Stormy Night...

"It ran at her again, and Lara continued firing. This thing obviously wouldn't die." That snippet from "Lara Croft and the Lost Island" by Edward Purkis is a delightfully understated selection from one of the more engaging entries in the Tomb Raider Fan Fiction Archive at **trarchive.ctimes.net/fanfic.html**. A treasure trove of stories written by fans of the inimitable Lara Croft, the Archive spotlights one of the more unusual aspects of Web fandom—the ability of Tomb Raider fans to add their own storytelling voices to the buzzing world of TR's online enthusiasts.

The Archive houses 37 stories by dozens of authors—some bad, and some (one named Sarah Crisman springs to mind) quite good. The stories range from the very short to involved novellas, and their titles mine the anthropological-adventure territory that we might more immediately associate with a guy by the name of Indiana Jones..."Lara Croft and the Tomb of the Gods," "The Eyes of Shiva," "Lara Croft and the Talisman of Shaolin," and so on. (OK, so "Lara Croft and the Temple of Doom," which actually resides at the Archive, may be coming a bit too close to Indy's legacy.)


Netscape - [The Tomb Raider Archive - Fan Fiction]
File Edit View Go Bookmarks Options Directory Window Help
Location: http://trarchive.ctimes.net/fanfic.html
Lara Croft and the Treasure of Califia - by C.Parkey
Lara Croft and the Talisman of Shaolin - by 'GALLOW'
Lara Croft and the Beast of the Forest - by Edward Purkis
Lara Croft and the Mummies of Peru - by Edward Purkis
Lara Croft and the Lost Ark - by Robert Wheeler
Document: Done
Start
Dial-Up Networking
My Computer
Paint Shop Pro
Netscape - [The ...
10:12 AM

It's a testament to Lara's impact that there exists a network of scribes eager to chronicle her continuing adventures, and it's funny how a computer game—that terrible threat to literacy and attention spans—should inspire such a committed literary response in its fans. It says something about the power of a game to stoke imaginations, and about the dire need for game developers to address their own stories as more than just framing devices in which to construct their increasingly elaborate tech workshops.

Sure, volumetric fogging and ray-tracing are all well and good; no one will argue that technology isn't essential to enjoyment of computer games. But the industry needs to understand that technology is not the core of our enjoyment. The most essential element in the joy of gaming is our active participation in an unfolding narrative. That's the element computer games offer which no other entertainment medium can. When we watch movies or listen to music, we are a passive audience for somebody else's performance. Actively helping to shape an adventure is an entirely different experience—and before computer games were invented, I would argue, *reading* was actually the closest thing. We have a story on the page before us, but it takes our imagination, our active participation in visualizing the story, to create a uniquely interactive feel.

Now, with technologically dazzling computer games supplying us with an endless number of virtual worlds to explore, game developers must return to the essential wonder of storytelling to fully capture our imaginations.

One look at scenes from the stories at the TR Fan Fiction Archive brings this immediately to light: Late-night visits from mysterious spies, cryptic warnings from ailing compatriots, cultish religions plotting natural disasters, ancient weapons of startling mystical power, horrific beasts with a thirst for blood.

Too often game developers seem to have their priorities backward. First they construct the impressive fog-effect of water reflection, and then they try to supply a half-cocked plot to justify the thing's existence in the game. They should start with nothing more audacious than words on a page...and then work to realize the imaginative creations of exotic locales, menacing death traps, treacherous companions, voracious wildlife, and an ultimately satisfying holy grail.

This is the stuff of drama, and the ideas generated at places like the Tomb Raider Fan Fiction Archive should be registering loud and clear in the offices of Core Design. It's not all about polygon smoothness and new animations. What we want is more mystery, more creativity, more character.

And hey, if the designers don't feel up to the task, Sarah's email address is on the site. Drop her a line, and maybe Tomb Raider IV will have a bit more spirit to it.

Daniel Morris is battling the Deadlines of Despair in the Lost City of Zimbobnahar. But he'll be checking his email when he gets back at noesc@pcgames.com.

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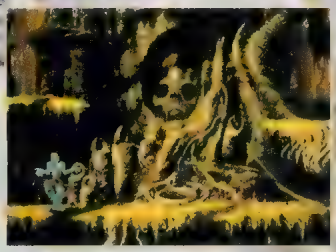

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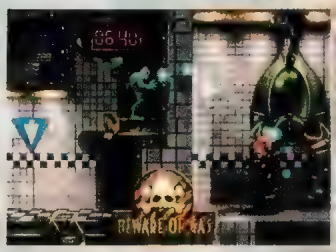

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A Giants Step for Planet Moon

Citizen Kabuto

By Peter Olafson

The giant's life is by necessity a lonely life. Smaller creatures tend to sweat spontaneously upon realization that their head and torso fit neatly into their neighbor's thumbprint. Smaller creatures tend to become agitated when dealing with a neighbor whose perspectives on the world include a "mouth-cam." Smaller creatures look up at a neighbor 10 times taller than their largest acquaintance and run in holy shrieking terror.

So it's understandable that Kabuto, the centerpiece in Planet Moon Studios' forthcoming Giants: Citizen Kabuto, lives an enforced monastic existence. The "01" stenciled across the nether regions of this toothy behemoth—he's the one manhandling our logo on the cover—really is the loneliest number. No Mrs. Kabuto to baste the roast Vimp (or pile up the next week's Vimp sandwiches and season and stir the Vimp soup). No Baby Kabuto to projectile-vomit Vimp pablum onto his giant shoulder.

Kabuto doing his giant thing: terrorizing Smarties.

Indeed, such visitors as have ventured down to the surface of the hurtling, Eden-like sliver of rock called The Island have been more interested in breaking the windows and boiling the internal organs of the indigenous wildlife. And, as a result, Kabuto's fond wish for a companion has withered into a profound mistrust of all creatures smaller than he…which is to say pretty much everyone else.

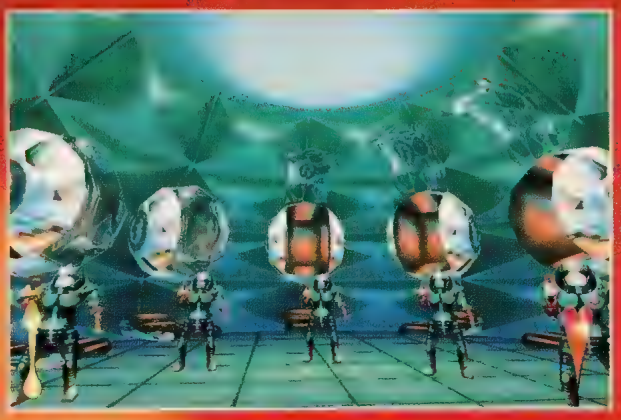
Delphi, an incipient Victoria's Secret model, rocks out while a Vimp looks on.

This has, shall we say, a limiting effect on his interactions with other species. He either throws them…or he eats them. In true Frankensteinian fashion, he exercised his baser passions on the very Sea Reapers who created him as guardian, forcing them back into the sea. There they stayed on their ships, developing their magic, leaving the great, lonely creature to his own sad devices. (In case you're wondering, his "citizenship" is self-proclaimed; Kabuto created the land he rules.)

Nevertheless, Planet Moon has conspired to provide its forlorn giant with companionship of a sort. Conceptually, anyway. When the game was shown at E^3 last year, it was more of an action/strategy hybrid with separate and distinct storylines for each of its three races: Meccaryns, Sea Reapers, and the Big Guys of the title. That ultimately proved too complicated, and the three storylines have since merged into a more action-oriented whole that will find you assuming all three roles in sequence—that is, until the end, when you'll hop between

characters. (In multiplay, you'll be able to select any of the three.)

We had a chance to chat with the game's creators and take a walk through this work-in-progress in early January—and we were nothing less than tickled by what we saw. Planet Moon, working from an unmarked office a stone's throw from the San Francisco Bay in the village of Sausalito, has taken up where Shiny Entertainment's MDK left off and built upon its fundamental beauties with openness, depth, and a distinctly British sense of humor. (And that's not just an idle reference: five members of the six-person Planet Moon staff worked on MDK, and four of them *are* Brits.)



The Meccs: Baz, Reg, Tel... No, Tel's over there. Oh, never mind. It's the Meccs.

The Sea Reapers ply the waters of The Island in these graceful craft.

In the final game (expected to ship from Interplay this summer), you'll find yourself controlling a Meccaryn squad—up to five Cockney humanoids with distinctive personalities and well-honed aggressive instincts—and a Sea Reaper, a tender morsel with a talent for magic, who cruises the coastal waters in the most diaphanous of negligees.

You'll also play a giant—though the folks at Planet Moon, not eager to entirely demystify their new baby, are grinningly vague about precisely what sort of giant you'll be. (Many of the enemies in the game are lesser giants of one sort or another.)

"Originally, when we started working on this, we were working on MDK still, and in one meeting, we were thinking of a mad game—spacemen, pirates, and giants fighting on an island," says Tim Williams, Planet Moon's creative director. "The spacemen turned into Meccs, the pirates into Sea Reapers. [At the time] the lead Sea Reaper, Delphi, was evil. She's now the queen's daughter, and the only Sea Reaper with a conscience.

"Sometimes, when I think of this game, I think of *The Magnificent Seven*—the villagers that are being ruled by some outlaw from over the hill," says Williams. "Then, all of a sudden, these guys show up from over the hill—these gunfighters. That's what it turns into."

The Meccs are the gunslingers, the villagers are the Smarties, and the outlaws are the Sea Reapers. The Meccs, a bunch of brawny lads who like a fight, decide that the Smarties are a bit of all right and agree to help them.

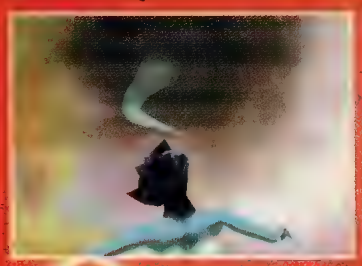
Only there's a complication: Baz falls in love with Delphi—the beautiful daughter of the Sea Reapers' queen.

"In the middle of a battle, he can just stop and stare in complete awe," says Williams. Love and rockets do not mix.

Eventually, you'll learn that there's a whole other land, with a whole new kind of threat. The threat's name: Kabuto.

How does it end up? Well, not to give anything away, but Planet Moon is planning a grand conflagration involving all three characters. "It's going to be of epic proportions," says Planet Moon vice president Bob Stevenson. "It basically ties everything together into a big knot."

All this will be carried off from a third/first-person view in a 3D world ripe with possibilities for humor and interesting destruction. The giant, of course, is likely to be chaos unchained. Delphi will have access to an array of intimidating spells. (We'll get to one in a bit.) And the Meccs, the foundation of the game, currently have about six basic weapons—ranging from handguns to shotguns to lasers.



Delphi spawns one wicked storm.

Now, humor in computer games has never been particularly easy to relate in print.

Dear Mrs. Johnson,

The melted remains I sent in my last letter were not those of your son. Our condolences. Your son, Joe, is attached above in this little baggie.

Please return the previously sent melted Private at your earliest convenience.

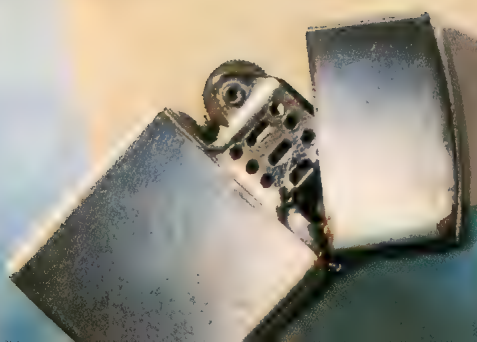
Deepest regrets,

Sarge

Sarge

P.S. Although there will never be another Joe, you'll be glad to know we're already molding others in his likeness.

Joe's Unit



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Toy soldier warfare moves to the kitchen, bedroom, front yard, and garage.
Intuitive Interface
New point-and-click mouse interface is easy for beginners and familiar to gamers.
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Magnifying glasses and spray cans complement your traditional arsenal.
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New worlds, weapons, and interface make this Top 10 multi-player game even better.
ARMY MEN II
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Usually it's better experienced than described.

But let me give it a shot. Wait'll you hear about the shrubberies.

Giants starts off with the player in control of a single Mecc, name of Baz. Have mouse-and-keyboard combo, will travel. Yes, I know we stipulated a squad of five. But nobody except non-delegating, testosterone-heavy types like James T. Kirk send their whole executive staff down to the surface of an unknown planet. (Eggs in one basket stuff, y'understand.)

The Meccs were bound for a "lad's holiday" on Planet Majorca when they ran afoul of a giant space fish. After making their way through its digestive system, they put in for repairs and two of 'em just *have* to check out the planet's surface. The other Meccs are still hanging out on the ship (and probably drinking the rest of the Guinness, reading the boss's email, and pushing all the red buttons).

Unhappily, the two sent down to scout out the surface have...well, no self-respecting Mecc would admit it, but they've gotten hung up. Specifically, by the ankles.

Sigh. If you want something done right, you've got to do it yourself. So off goes

Baz, freshly arrived on The Island, proceeds to burn down the local fauna.

GIANT DENIZENS

We don't want to take anything away from Giants: Citizen Kabuto's refreshingly bright, almost pastel locales, nor downplay its technologically advanced engine and great sound-effects. But what really brings this game to life are the colorful characters that interact with one another (and you) in ways you're unlikely to have seen before. Here's a roll call of this delightfully quirky cast.

THE MECCS

These wacky little guys have personality, and it's watching them grow and interact both with each other and the environment that will be one of the game's main pleasures. They'll be the ones you control for about 40 percent of the game.

"The idea is that you'll feel like you're playing the game with four others around you," says Tim Williams, creative director. In the beginning, squadmates won't really be much help—Gordon and Bennett are too busy partying to pick up a distress signal in the beginning of the game, for instance. But as you progress, so will they. Instead of bumbling along behind you, they'll be running for a strategic position and lobbing grenades at foes. Rather than always fire at what you're targeting, they'll evaluate the biggest threat and gang up on that.

Baz, the leader, is always trying to organize and motivate the motley cockney crew, with varying success.

"Baz is good for a kick in the pants. He's a 'get the job done, then go for a pint and cigarette' kind of guy," says Tim. "While Gordon and Bennett, whether there's a job to do or not, they're in the bar having a pint. They're the two flakes, and together they make one giant ball of flakiness."

Tel and Reg are the followers, though it's their curious side that gets the group involved in The Island's affairs. Tel's also a bit of a romantic, and he's clearly smitten with Delphi.

SMARTIES

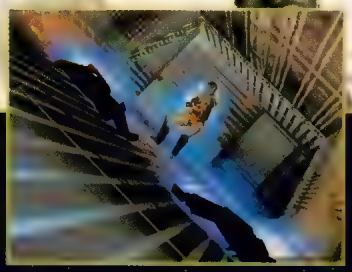
Smarties play the role of tech upgraders in the game. Keep 'em happy by feeding them Vimp meat, and they'll build you presents that could range from jetpack upgrades to different vehicles and weapons. But at heart, they're the most hedonistic group in the game.

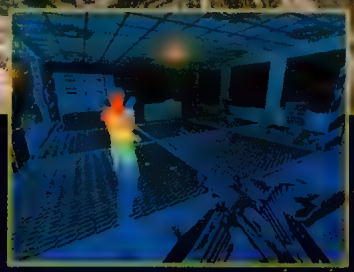
"You're doing 100 percent of stuff for them, getting them pieces of meat and so on, and 10 percent of these items go into making stuff for you, while the rest goes to different upgrades [of their

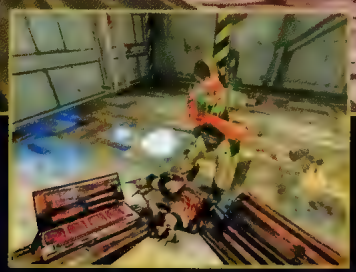
Continued on page 56

Smarties yukking it up at the bar they built.

THE DEADLIEST CREATURES
IN THE UNIVERSE ARE ABOUT TO
MEET THEIR MATCH...







ALIENS VERSUS PREDATOR

- **SCALE WALLS** and elevator shafts as an Alien and advance with frightening speed as you attack to devour your opponents.
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Actual Game Screens

OTHER.

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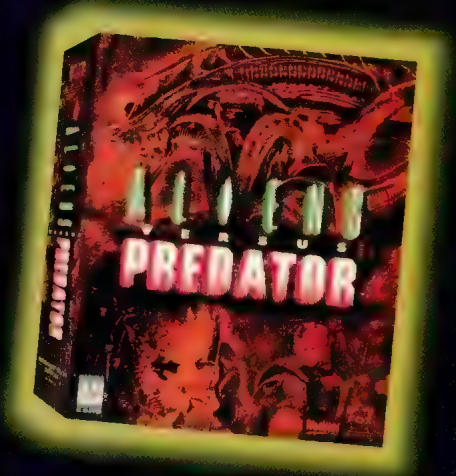
— *Computer Gaming World*

"Scaring the crap out of the big boys."
— *PC Accelerator*

"Is there anyone that doesn't want to play this one?"
— *PC Gamer*



Environmental Audio

MATURE

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FOX INTERACTIVE

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Delphi deals some serious spells.

Baz, gun hot in hand, down to the lush tropical island. And, ostensibly, it looks as though we're in for a third/first-person shooter with a slightly silly premise (and maybe just a touch of Bullfrog in its throat).

Your comrades in arms aren't far away from the landing zone and, once freed by a judicious blast or two, will take up positions at your sides. They are smart and will get smarter with experience. They'll watch your tail. They'll provide covering fire. They'll attack aggressively with a press of a function key and without a raft of wingman-style commands. (The game is simplicity itself. You'll be allowed to grow slowly into each character. The camera, Zelda-style, stays centered on your target as you circle via jetpack. And you won't have to worry about memorizing an array of orders. As Giants develops, each compact command set is replaced by another.)

"When you start doubling up on commands in an action game—fire up one and then, during that, hit another action key—we begin to lose people," says Planet Moon president Nick Bruty.

This would be a good time to go back to the ship. Baz radios for a pick-up. Hello? Hello? There's no answer. The two remaining Meccs are totally wasted and probably have the radio tuned to Iron Maiden.

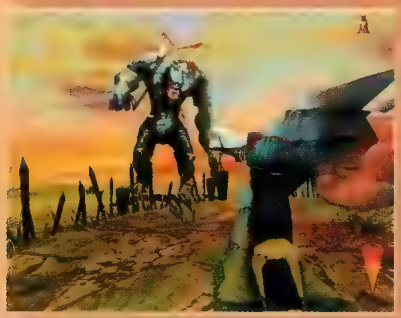
The Meccs practice the art of camouflage. Nyuck-nyuck.

So you explore. At length, your travels will bring your little threesome to a defended gate. This is Giants' first challenge. Now, this isn't a one-solution situation. The Meccs can storm the gate, fire up their jetpacks, shoot down the Cyclops guards, and win the battle at the possible expense of their physical well-being. Or they can finesse it: They can disguise themselves as shrubbery. (Again, these disguises are just a keypress away.)

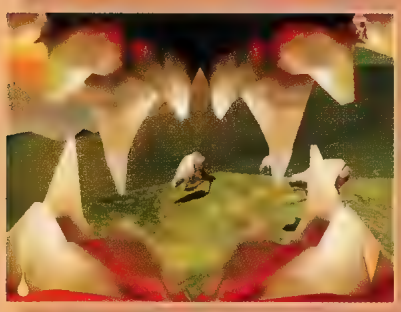
Now, it has to be said, these shrubs would not fool anyone. They don't look quite like anything else around. They sort of appear out of nowhere. They look as though someone just bought them for $29.99 at The Island Nursery. And they move.

But they're enough. They'll get you through the gate, if you observe a little caution and don't make any sudden movements while the enemy is looking at you, and you'll be able to blast them from behind.

Oh, did I mention that the first-person view from within the shrubbery is mostly covered with foliage? I'd say this was



Kabuto



Mmm, Vimps via mouth-cam.

Continued from page 52

lifestyle]—from a pub to a harem to a swimming pool." You'll go away on a mission and come back to find them lolling by a newly built pool sipping a nice, cool drink.

But next time you come back, they might present you with a giant gun. "It's a visual reward thing," Williams says. "You'll always see something interesting with the Smarties."

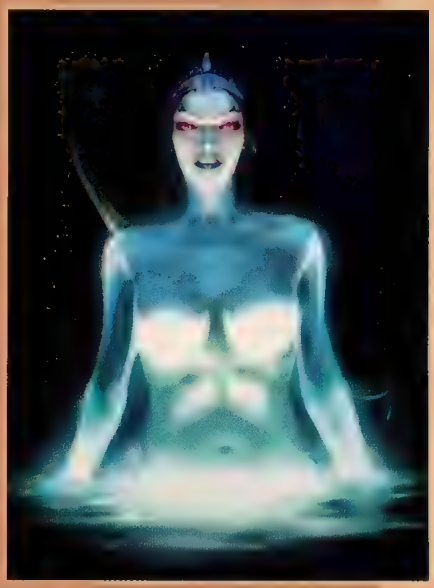
KABUTO AND THE SEA REAPERS

The Sea Reapers used their magic power to create Kabuto, but made one fatal mistake: He became self-aware and grumpy. He decimated the Sea Reapers and kicked them into the ocean, then built his own land and learned how to create the shepherd creatures that tend to his flocks of Vimps. But he's unhappy. He has an existentialist dilemma: "Where did I come from? What am I doing?"

Williams and the rest of the team are coy about whether it's actually Kabuto or a comparable giant that you get to control for about 30 percent of the game. Nevertheless, the King Kong–like attacks are a blast to see—picking up Vimps and tossing them at attackers, or swatting at Meccs buzzing around him, or grabbing and throwing them into his cavernous mouth, or slamming a creature onto one of his dreadful spikes to save for later should he get a bit peckish.

DELPHI AND THE SEA REAPERS

Delphi is the only Sea Reaper with a conscience. While the rest of the Sea Reapers intend to take back the land and are willing to enslave Smarties to do so, Delphi becomes sympathetic to their plight. She commands powerful spells, like the amazing tornado and a shadow spell that makes a creature's shadows attack its caster, and the ability to summon sea creatures to do her bidding.



Delphi

YOUR PEOPLE have been trapped on a hostile world for 1,300 years.

YOUR PAST is a single ancient ruin and a blackened stone that points the way to the center of the galaxy.

YOUR PRESENT is a quest for answers and a five mile long starship that took 60 years to build.

THE FUTURE. . . is in jeopardy.

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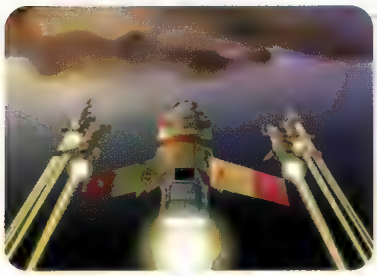
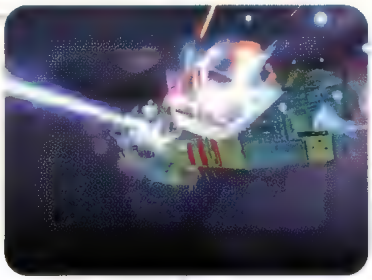
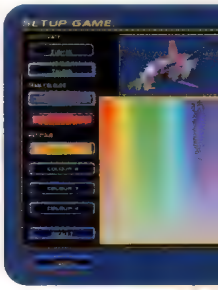


Choose unit types, fleet formations and flight tactics to create the best combat group for each tactical situation.



An advanced research tree lets you construct 54 ships between two distinct races, from lightly armored fighter class interceptors to gigantic carriers that can build and transport up to 250 ships into battle.

Detailed weapon systems - including mass drivers, guided missiles, ion cannons and mines - operate automatically to track multiple or single targets.



Customize you from fuel co and fleet mission objec even the col for your A

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LOCATION: The Great Wasteland.

DESTINATION: Galactic Core.

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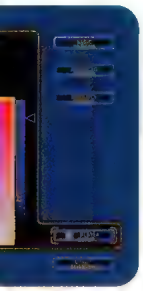

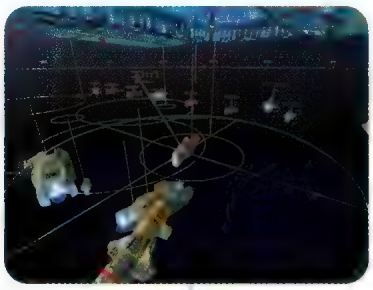

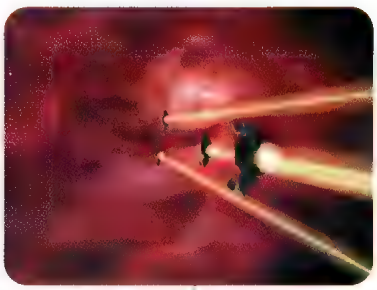

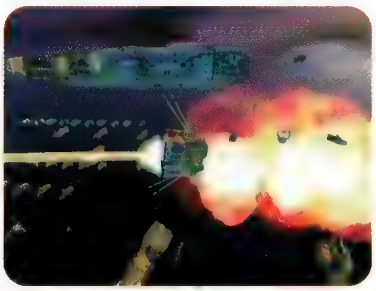

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Command the smallest scout ship or your entire armada in an unrestricted 3D world for pinpoint control.

Explore super detailed galactic regions, from asteroid fields to nebulae to dust clouds.

Lead your Armada through 16 single-player missions, or play against seven opponents over the Internet or LAN in multiplayer scenarios. A robust mission editor lets you create your own maps for online campaigns.

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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

When the Smarties look at you with those big ol' eyes, don't you just wanna let them build a casino for you?

inspired by the Three Stooges, except it's much, much sillier.

This path takes you to the first of the Smarties. These are escapees from *Mars Attacks* with better tolerance for yodeling cowboys, and, befriended in the wild or freed from Sea Reaper torture chambers, they're essential allies. The way to their hearts is through their stomachs, and, if supplied with food in a timely manner, they'll build a range of useful gifts. (You don't take a direct hand in the manufacture; you're simply a facilitator.) So far, Planet Moon has the Smarties producing a bar/restaurant, a swimming pool, a casino, a range of guns, improvements to the Mecc jetpack, and Arabic tents packed with beautiful women.

Again, if you don't provide work for idle Smartie pants, they're likely to get depressed, wander off, fight among themselves, and even kill each other. And, as they're finite in number, a dead Smartie is a wasted Smartie. (In multiplay, you'll be able to kidnap Smarties from rival camps.)

But either way, it's nice to have choices—and interesting consequences for your mistakes—and, while the game is broadly linear, Giants promises enough flexibility to create some interesting choices. (For instance, some decisions will take you off to islands that aren't directly related to the story, and, at press time, Planet Moon is kicking around ideas for bonus sections.)

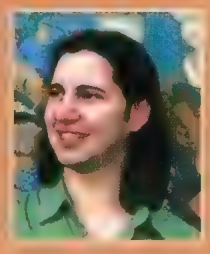
MEET THE MOONIES

Name: Nick Bruty
Title: President, co–Art/Design Director
Giant Responsibilities: Bob and I share all art duties, including 3D models, textures, cover art, and so forth.

Then I mix it up with Tim and Bob on game design. I also sign lots of things. Of course, I have the dubious honor of being president, which in many small countries would get me shot. However, at Planet Moon, I just make outrageous demands like my mentor, Henry VIII.
Notable: Presidential duties require acting grown up and talking directly to publishers. An average day for my ear could go a little like: "Where's that schedule?"; "How MUCH?"; "You're behind schedule!"; "You're in front of schedule!"; and "Where are you?"

Being independent can be a headache at times, especially as I had planned on drifting through life skillfully avoiding any responsibilities; but alas, I feel as though I would've lost all interest in developing games if I had stayed within the safety of a larger company.

Name: Bob Stevenson
Title: Vice President, co–Art/Design Director
Giant Responsibilities: Nick and I pretty much divide all the artwork down the middle, from backgrounds to front covers (but not animation; that's Shawn's raison d'être). This makes life very simple. Either I do it or Nick does it. I've had a lot of fun creating characters for Giants. It's the first game I've worked on where they've come fairly easily, whereas before it felt like removing my teeth one by one with a rusty oyster fork.



Notable: My greatest achievement is giving up surfing. After two major surfing accidents at the same beach in Orange County, I realized it wasn't my bag. So I gave it up and moved to San Francisco where I confine all physical activity to my home, bars, and restaurants.

A lot of people ask what we do when we're not making games. Well, I'm an avid collector of old-fashioned street scenes. My prized possession has to be the 1:4 replica of Shaftsbury Avenue, circa 1873.

I also have a deep-rooted tonal fascination for the wooden bars of the xylophone, and a healthy disrespect for yesterday's newspapers.

Mainly, though, I enjoy wine.

Name: Tim Williams
Title: Creative Director
Giant Responsibilities: Design, more design, and story. Any extra time (yeah, right) goes into the PM Web site, and some of the Planet Moon PR.

Notable: My greatest achievement is scaling my one-foot model of Mt. Everest in just three days, and only losing two Sherpas in the process! My favorite pastime is running a homeless shelter for "Buffalo" sparrows. These are sparrows deluded into thinking they're bison. To be weaned from this unfortunate behavior, mini horns made out of toothpicks must be stapled to the sparrow's forehead. The last part of this two-step program is to throw it forcefully at a wall.

Name: Andy Astor
Title: Programming Director & CFO
Giant Responsibilities: The programming tasks get divided up between Scott and me in a somewhat random "Who has time for this?" approach. I've done most of the graphics, sound, input, and AI code, though there's certainly been overlap. There are

The only way to feed those Smarties is to mow down a herd of Vimps. These pathetic wedges of shapeless, pale flesh perched atop two legs (known as "cows" within Planet Moon) can be reduced to flying chunks of red meat with a few shots from your blasters and collected by your fellows with another keypress.

The Meccs convert the pathetic Vimps into food.

Even in this formative version, Giants showed a gift for preying on my emotions.

Watching them fall on their sides, kick their legs, and bawl, I could only feel sorry for the Vimps.

At the same time, I was laughing at all the flying Vimp meat.

And that's not the only time I felt something. Consider the Sea Reaper. Delphi numbers among her gifts the ability to spawn a tornado. (See the AVI on this issue's CD.) And what a tornado. This towering twister, stretching from Vimp pasture to gray cloud, is such an epochal event—so huge and so deeply dark, the swept-up Vimps so immensely high in the air and so utterly helpless—and so damn funny, I wasn't sure whether to open my mouth in awe or laughter.

So I did both. It lasted for a while, and while I expect it looked funny, it felt good. It still feels good when I think about it weeks later.

And I know this: The next time I laugh at Giants, I won't be alone. ■

also a number of utilities and world builders that both Scott and I have written. I also have the exciting task of balancing the company checkbook and handling financial matters that I can't pass on to my wife, Stacy, who is a financial planner and who, luckily, handles all our company benefits.

Favorite: It's great working with a small group of talented individuals without any bureaucracy. Though I enjoy cutting-edge technology and we do push the capabilities of today's machines, I enjoy our approach of using tricks and non-standard techniques rather than simply trying to out-polygon the competition. It's great that our technologically savvy artists are able to create works of art using these techniques, and it is one of the main things that makes us stand out. As one of the two token Americans on the team, it's also my job to keep the team fed with American favorites like pigs-in-blankets and chicken wings.

Name: Shawn Nelson
Title: Lead Animator
Giant Responsibilities: As lead animator of Giants, I have the most dangerous job. It's my responsibility to wrangle all the various creatures you see in the game and make sure they are well fed and get daily exercise. My favorite thing is to run the Rippers at the park in the afternoon. We hardly ever have problems as long as they get fed before we go, and after that poodle incident, I make sure they are.

Favorite: The most dangerous part of my job is getting the various creatures into the motion-capture rigs. The Vimps are a breeze—so gentle and docile. But I can't tell you how many times I've almost fallen off the ladder while hooking up the giants. They hate to sit still! Once they're hooked up, I have to direct the creatures to behave as if they were hand-animated in order to get that sense of character I'm always striving for. It's not always easy. Some of them just move too much like real animals, and I have to act the scene out for them. But it always works out in the end.

At the end of each day, when the creatures are all tucked in for the night and if I'm not getting stitches from a Ripper swipe or burn treatment from a wayward staff pulse, we like to get together at the Smartie Pub and tell stories of the day's adventures. It's not an easy job being the lead animator here at Planet Moon, but after a while you get hooked on the adrenaline, and now I wouldn't want it any other way.

Name: Scott Guest
Title: Principal Software Engineer
Giant Responsibilities:

Developing and maintaining the animation engine. Now, this is no simple task! It has over 10 spindles, wheels, knobs, and cogs (not to mention thousands of teeth), which together drive almost all the animation in the game. You can imagine just how many "drive belts" are needed to do this. Boggles my mind!

Landscaping (or gardening) involves following strict rules and laws governing the "culling" of baby cells (or unwanted pieces of land) that try (yet don't need) to appear on screen.

Flick playing: a very important part of Giants that enables artists to create short cut-scenes consisting of Moving Pictures. These pictures move in such a way that they tell a very important story.

Favorite: Discovering, as I did (yet borrowing from a famous Swiss watchmaker), the idea of using quartz to smoothly blend character animations.

Favorite Pastime: Hanging out in a firkin or barrel full of monkeys, where we discuss the day-to-day chaos of programming games whilst drinking water.

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Services with a Smile

Rating today's online-gaming options

By Cindy Vanous

In the mid-'90s, there were companies founded on the belief that selling access to exclusive games could be turned into a profitable business. Back in 1996, both TEN and Mplayer thought they could become bajillionaires by offering subscription-only gameplay services. Gamers, they figured, would be willing to pay for exclusive games no one else offered (exactly what TEN did with Duke Nukem). They would build communities around those exclusive games and offer performance and services (like tournaments) unavailable on the great unwashed Internet.

Back then, it seemed like a reasonable idea. But from day one, TEN and Mplayer faced the "Why buy the cow when you can get the milk for free?" challenge. Quake's client/server-based architecture, which allowed anyone to set up servers, and free company-sponsored services like Battle.net made the pay-to-play services even less attractive. Now games like Half-Life and Tribes allow you to find multiplayer matches within the game engine, so you don't even have to visit any pay sites to find a match.

These developments, and gamers' realization that it's pretty easy to find and build their own communities, forced the TENs and Mplayers to turn their business models away from the hardcore to a more mainstream focus. Mplayer's gone to mostly free (with charges for premium games), and TEN's focus has shifted away from the retail front to more family-oriented parlor games such as cards and checkers, and uncomplicated, online-only social games.

Against this ever-shifting backdrop, we visited the main gaming sites using dial-up, ISDN, and T1 connections. We wanted to see what progress the services have made, what they have to offer the hardcore gamer, and whether or not they're worth the cash it'll cost you to play. So hold on to your modems, folks—we're counting down the top networks from TEN to WON.

TEN's original claim to fame was its exclusive retail tie-ins, making it the place to be if you wanted action gaming on the online front. But the recent shift in its member focus has changed all that. In fact, TEN hasn't integrated a retail game since Quake II.

Due to its affiliation with the Professional Gamers' League, it'll likely continue carrying the titles that the professional gamers are fraggin' around in. But right now, the gaming's rather sparse at TEN, and the games it carries have a definite family-oriented tint to them.

But the games featured on TEN are supported very well indeed. Tournaments and competitions abound, some with exceptional prizes. Constantly updated rankings provide a Who's Who of each title's luminaries. And although most game networks have ratings or ladders of some sort, TEN's has the unique distinction of being based on the U.S. Chess Federation scoring system. This puts more weight on the skill and standing of your opponents than on the number of newbies you can trash.

The catch, of course, is that you need to subscribe in order to be ranked. At $20 a month (on top of the costs of the retail games and your Internet-connection charges), this may be a bit beyond the inclinations or pocketbooks of some players. In addition, users have reported frequent disconnection problems and occasional service outages, which can be quite annoying in the middle of an adrenaline-infused ranked match. Finally, our

The staff of TEN's Twilight Lands often spices up the game with "surprise content" such as scavenger hunts.

annels Fullscreen Mail Print Edit

own attempt to connect via an ISDN line met with bizarre results and necessitated a good amount of tweaking before TEN would recognize the link. But, once we were connected, the gaming was a blast!

URL: *www.ten.net*
Price: Free for card games, limited shareware, retail-game matchmaking
$9.95/month, $1.95/hour for additional retail-game matchmaking, rankings, email, first 5 hours/month included
$19.95/month or $39.90/three months—same as $9.95 plan, but with unlimited hours
Internet connection plan also available for $1.35/hour
Subscribers: Undisclosed, before parlor games were integrated, estimates were in the 30,000 range
Games: AD&D Dark Sun Online, Blood, C&C: Red Alert, Diablo, Magic: The Gathering, Myth, NASCAR Racing, Panzer General, Quake II, Shadow Warrior, Total Annihilation, Twilight Lands, Warcraft, others
Alliances: 3D Realms, Blizzard, MicroProse, Papyrus
Architecture: Peer-to-peer matchmaking, some server-based games (Dark Sun) with servers distributed across the U.S.

Performance: Reasonably fast play, intuitive interface, some disconnect and outage problems, oddities when connecting via ISDN
Gimmick: Excellent ranking system, Professional Gamers' League
Community: Hardcore, close-knit, always happy to meet "fresh meat"
Grade: B-

msn Gaming ZONE

Ever want to play Quake II at 3 a.m. but can't find an English-speaking opponent? Looking for a Boggle buddy in the wee hours of the morning? Plenty of bloodthirsty insomniacs hang out on Microsoft's multiplayer network, as do the puzzle addicts, card sharps, and fans of forgotten and overlooked titles. Want to play Go? Hellbender? Transformers: Beast Wars? Star Wars Monopoly? Strange

UltraCorps allows only one move a day—slow-paced, but highly addictive.

though this may seem, they're all there, alongside the more traditional fare of big-name action and strategy games like Rainbow Six and Shogo. And with anywhere from 6,000 to 20,000 users on the Zone at any given time, somebody's always looking to take you on.

In addition to its extensive support for retail matchmaking, the Zone offers a trio of premium titles. The coolest of these is a blessed, welcome anachronism—an homage to the glorious age of play-by-mail space-conquest campaigns, when you sent in your moves and waited with happy anticipation to see how the universe would evolve in turn. This game is called UltraCorps, and it has eaten my life.

Finally, not to be outdone by TEN, the Zone is also generous with contests and tournaments. Witness the Rumble for Rome finals, in which four top Age of Empires players were flown to Seattle for the ultimate showdown. At the end of the battle-filled evening, a student from Ontario donned a shiny purple cape, was armed to the teeth, and declared Grand Emperor of Rome. As he crossed swords with Thresh and smiled for the cameras, the MC handed him an airline ticket to Rome and a check for $2,000. *Tell* me that isn't cool.

The basic membership is free, the connections are stable, the play speed is good, the firewall hassles are few and far between. Even the premium games are reasonably priced. In fact, the only real drawback we can see to the Zone is the nagging suspicion that it may be an evil plot to make Microsoft even more indispensable.

URL: *www.zone.com*
Price: Free for card and board games, extensive shareware and retail-game matchmaking, rankings
$1.95/day, $9.95/month, or $19.90/three months for exclusive premium games, free trial available
Subscribers: 3,000,000
Games: Age of Empires, Axis & Allies, Boggle, Civ II Multiplayer, Cribbage, Fighter Ace, Golf '99, Heretic II, MechCommander, Quake II, Rainbow Six, Ruthless.com, Shogo, Spades, Total Annihilation, UltraCorps, X-Wing vs. TIE Fighter, others
Alliances: Hasbro Interactive, LucasArts, MicroProse, Microsoft (duh), Red Storm, Simutronics, VR-1
Architecture: Peer-to-peer matchmaking and some server-based games, servers localized in Washington
Performance: Fast play, intuitive interface, rare disconnects, a few firewall problems
Gimmick: Extensive list of available games, including unusual titles

Community: Casual to hardcore, varies by game, lack of in-room moderators offset by handy "ignore" feature
Grade: A-

MPLAYER.COM

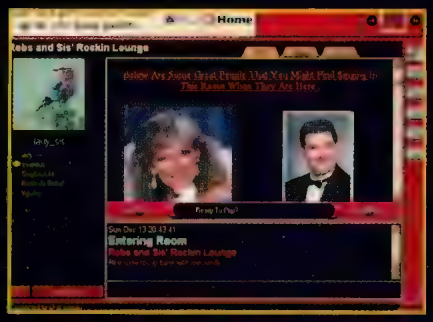
Action gamers have plenty of places to camp (assuming they don't mind being chewed out for it). Armchair strategists can spread out the virtual game board practically anywhere. Even puzzle junkies have their digital table in the park. But where can a role-playing fan go to slip into something a little more medieval—particularly if they're finally sick of Diablo? As it happens, Mplayer hosts no less than seven detailed role-playing realms. Between the text-based MUDs, premium graphical lands, and retail RPG titles, you'll soon have enough invented personalities to keep a fleet of therapists happy for years. And if the suppressed craving for Diablo resumes its scratching and howling at the back of your little gamer brain, Mplayer's got that, too.

From the cockpit of a multi-ton tank in Mplayer's Terra, all things look like targets. Muhahahahahahah!

Not that role-playing variety is the network's only selling point—it also boasts over 75 other titles. It's interesting to note, though, that Mplayer never uses its coverage as an excuse to take itself too seriously. As a matter of fact, this is one exceptionally laid-back service, which makes it a fun place to hang out even when you're not interested in playing games.

Mplayer also features unique audio support that allows anyone with a PC microphone to talk (really, moving-lips-instead-of-fingers kind of talk) in their chat rooms. Novel, but most of the folks around here who've tried it out have been underimpressed. Kudos for trying something different, but give me a call when it's in the games—then we'll talk.

You can also upload photos to your personal audio room and show off your finest grin while you gab with long-distance friends, run a live discussion group, or inflict karaoke on your peers. Sure, you'll meet a few freaks and probably see at least one picture you wish you hadn't. But, hey, where else are you going to find an online audience for your heartfelt rendition of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds"?



Mplayer's audio-chat feature allows you to set up a discussion room and customize it to your personal taste (or lack thereof).

The price is certainly right, although some of the premium games can be a tad on the steep side for their nature. No matter how cool the gameworld might be, I have trouble paying the same monthly amount for a text-based RPG as I would for Ultima Online. Also, some of the established user groups on Mplayer can be snobbish and unkind to newcomers. Add to this an unpredictable play speed with occasional disconnects, and you've got an environment which has great potential, but could use a bit of polish.

URL: *www.mplayer.com*

Price: Free for card and board games, Java-based arcade-style games, extensive gaming

$3.95/month for additional retail-game matchmaking, rankings, additional user features, additional tournaments and contests

$39.95/year or $49.90/two years—same as monthly plan, but includes strategy magazine subscription

$7.95 to $14.95/month each, exclusive premium games, free trial available

Subscribers: 2,000,000

Games: C&C: Red Alert, DragonRealms, Gemstone III, Hearts, Hercules & Xena, Links LS 1999, MechCommander, Panzer General II, Populous: The Beginning, Quake II, Rainbow Six, Ruthless.com, Scrabble, Terra, Underlight, Unreal, others

Alliances: Activision, EA, Eidos, Red Storm, Simutronics, SSI

Architecture: Peer-to-peer matchmaking, some server-based games, servers distributed across the U.S.

Performance: Speed varies, some connection problems, reasonably intuitive interface, occasional disconnects, some oddities when accessing from behind a firewall

Gimmick: Extensive RPG support, audio-chat rooms

Community: Casual, close-knit, sometimes clique-ish

Grade: B-

FAST FREE ONLINE GAMING
HEAT.NET

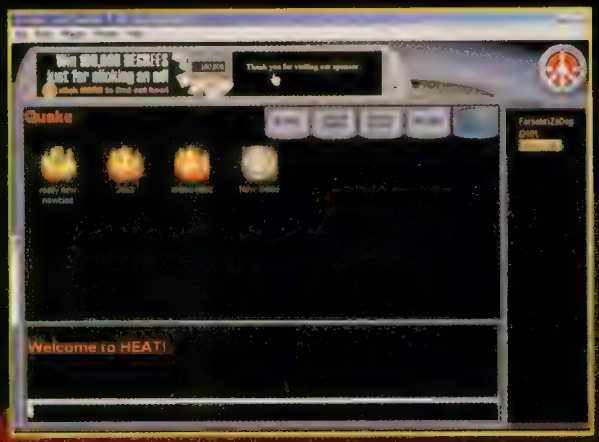
Now here's an intriguing notion—a gaming network with its own built-in currency system. The points, or "Degrees," you earn while playing on HEAT are not only an indicator of your innate superiority, but also a virtual asset. For instance, your accumulated Degrees can be used in at least one of HEAT's exclusive games to upgrade your equipment and arsenal. And that's not all.

"Plus" members (the good little users who [illegible] monthly six bucks to the coffers of HEAT.net) can use their Degrees to purchase items in the network's online store. Web

Imagine *The Running Man* with nuclear-armed vehicles, and you've got HEAT's DeathDrome.

a current subscription and a few thousand accumulated points, you too can pick up software for cheap or free. Best of all, if you're in the mood to make a few lesser mortals pay for their overconfidence, you can even wager Plus-level Degrees on your prowess in Quake or NetFighter. Care to take real-world trophies of your victories? You can win T-shirts, new games, and even hardware (like a 56K modem).

But earning digital Skiball tickets isn't enough to compensate for sporadic performance. There still seem to be bugs in HEAT's software: we had connection problems on half the PCs we attempted to hook up with. And if you're having trouble connecting, you may never get to play at all. AOL and Prodigy users can't access HEAT, and firewall users will have a bear of a time wagering their Degrees. Disconnects were relatively frequent once we managed to log on, although fortunately the network is good at preventing Degree loss if a drop occurs in the middle of a wagered game. We did find the HEAT interface intuitive and its user community to be friendly; but, in the end, we couldn't take the kitchen so we got out of HEAT.



Web: *www.heat.net*

Price: Free for extensive retail matchmaking, rankings, exclusive games

$5.95/month or $15.95/three months—same as above, but adds Degree wagering and discounts, additional contests and tournaments

$49.95/twelve months—same as monthly plan above, but includes a free retail game

Subscribers: 500,000

Games: Age of Empires, Baldur's Gate, C&C: Red Alert, DeathDrome, Diablo, Forsaken, Jedi Knight, Outlaws, Quake II, Redneck Rampage, SiN, Total Annihilation, Unreal, Vigilance, Warcraft II, others

Alliances: Activision, Blizzard, LucasArts, MicroProse

Architecture: Peer-to-peer matchmaking, servers distributed across the U.S.

Performance: Reasonably fast play, intuitive interface, and nice "home base" feature, occasional disconnects and outages, setup and connection troublesome on two out of the four computers we tried, Degree wagering problematic for firewall-inhibited users, no access for AOL or Prodigy users

Gimmick: Built-in currency system to reward players

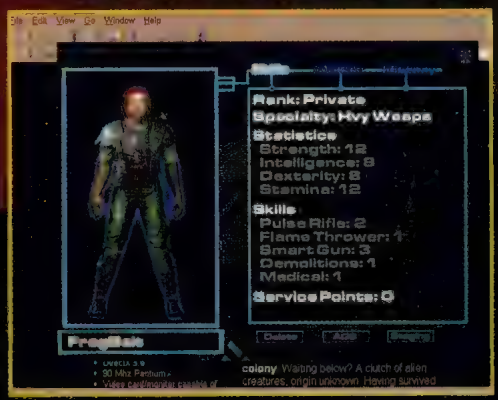
Community: Mostly hardcore, varies by game

Grade: D+

GAMESTORM

Admittedly, this service is a bit different from the other gaming networks. Unlike its competition, GameStorm offers no retail game matchmaking, no high-profile tournaments, and (blasphemous as it might seem to the uninitiated) not even a smidgen of Quake. What it does offer is more than 20 premium games, all included under the single monthly subscription fee. It also includes one of the finest user communities available on the Internet, no exaggeration. All game networks have a staff of helpful online moderators, and GameStorm is no exception. But, somehow, this service's professional geniality seems to have rubbed off onto its players. These people are downright pleasant and hospitable.

Allow me to present a small example, though telling it might damage my gamer pride. While evaluating Legends of Kesmai, a GameStorm RPG, I managed to get my fledgling character into a world of hurt. One flight of dungeon stairs too many, and I was surrounded by angry monsters who pounded me flatter than a roadkill possum. Surprised, annoyed, and quite definitely dead, I escaped to the main chat screen and announced my stupidity. Immediately, a group of players banded together into a rescue party,



When GameStorm's founder first saw an alien in the very creepy Aliens Online, he got so freaked that he blew away half his own team. (Truth.)

rushed down to the dungeon, and found the level on which I'd been terminated. They then proceeded to kill every living thing within a ten-room radius, gather up the spoils, and return, loot-laden, so that I could identify my former possessions.

Legends of Kesmai, GameStorm's top RPG, has been evolving online for more than fifteen years.

Okay, so LOK's graphics might be a bit more dated than certain other online RPGs', but this beats the hell out of having somebody offer to enchant my pants and then run off, laughing, as the cool breeze raises goose bumps on my virtual shins.

Playing for Free

In the early days of Web gaming, software did exist (like Kali) that allowed you to play multiplayer games over the Net. Of course, if you were sharp enough to understand how to use most of these, you could simply write your own operating system, get rich, and then play network games over the high-speed LAN you constructed in your basement.

Now, with the advent of company-sponsored sites and easy-to-use client/server capabilities built into Quake II and other games, even Dan Quayle can set up or join his own online multiplayer game (but he still spells it "multoe-player").

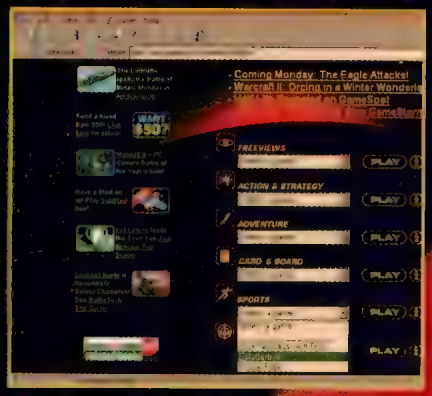
If you're a Starcraft fan, there's no reason to head anywhere other than Battle.net to get your gaming and community fix. Ditto for Myth II—Bungie.net is the place to be.

Accolade's gettin' in the action with servers for its new combat/shooter Redline. Definitely look for this trend to continue (and offer your praises to the gaming gods for allowing it to happen—all you need is a registered copy of the game to play).

Plus, a variety of shareware tools have arisen that make it a snap to find and connect to low-ping game servers. Tools like GameSpy (www.gamespy.com), PingTool (www.pingtool.com), and the new EnterNET Global Network (www.egnus.com) find servers and are constantly adding "buddy" features to get you in touch with gamers from around the globe without needing a membership card from any service. Bad news for gaming services that want to make a living charging gamers for online action, but great news for the rest of us.

Grade (for co-sponsored sites and gaming tools): **A+** *—Joel Strauch*

The pricing is excellent considering that none of the games need to be purchased individually before playing, the play speed is generally good, the interface is extremely intuitive, and disconnects are rare. The only slight annoyance is the quality of the games' art—you certainly can't compare it to Unreal or Baldur's Gate in terms of appearance. But a full hand of gameplay beats a flush of graphics any day, and GameStorm's titles are extremely addictive.

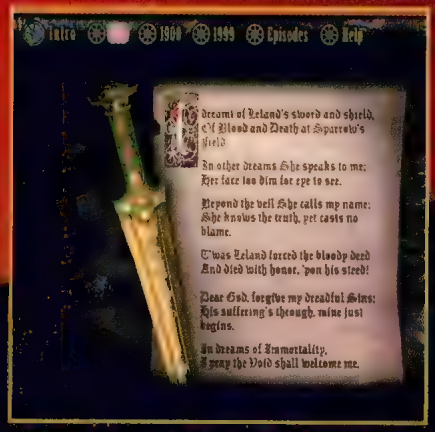


URL: *www.gamestorm.com*
Price: Free for Java-based [illegible]
$9.95/month for 20 [illegible] premium games and rankings [illegible]
Subscribers: [illegible]
Games: [illegible] Casino Poker, Catchword, [illegible], Jack Nicklaus Golf, Legends of K[illegible], Multiplayer BattleTech, Starship Troopers, Warcraft II, others
Alliances: Kesmai (of course), Mythic
Architecture: Server-based games, servers localized in Virginia
Performance: Usually fast play, some lag during prime hours, intuitive interface, rare disconnects, some firewall hassles, most games have low system requirements
Gimmick: All-inclusive membership for premium content, great community
Community: Casual, extremely close-knit, very helpful and friendly moderators and players
Grade: B-

It's tough to be the new kid on the block. By the time WON.net popped into existence, all of the main niches of online gaming had already been filled by its elder siblings, none of whom had any inclination or reason to share. So, instead of scrounging for unsupported games or offering something weird like "naked casino hour," WON turned its service into a hybrid multiplayer network and Web-based game magazine. An in-house staff of writers assembles reviews, hints, and tips for all the latest games (although most of the reviews now come from IGN) and scours the Internet for demos to host on WON's extremely fast ftp server.

This newcomer network has also commissioned exclusive new entertainment for its perennial visitors, including a recent Web-based mystery called The Cypher, which aired once a week and inspired a cult-like following. Best of all, in a rare break from game-network tradition, WON's premium content doesn't cost a penny—it's all free.

Now, this isn't to say that WON is lacking in its selection of available retail games. Unfortunately, almost all of its matchmaking is devoted to Sierra On-Line titles, but it's made exceptions for Quake II and Unreal. And lest we forget that Half-Life was a Sierra release, this is the only place you can go when suffused with the urge to chuck a burning handful of alien death at some anonymous guy

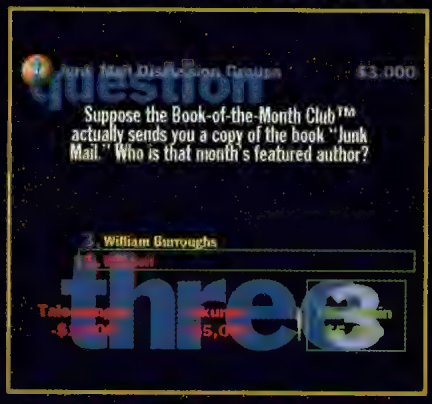

Intro
1900
1999
Episodes
Help
Dreams of Leland's sword and shield,
Of Blood and Death at Sparrow's field
In other dreams She speaks to me;
Her face too dim for eye to see.
Beyond the veil She calls my name;
She knows the truth, yet casts no blame.
'Twas Leland forced the bloody deed
And died with honor, 'pon his steed!
Dear God, forgive my dreadful Sins;
His suffering's through, mine just begins.
In dreams of Immortality,
I pray the Void shall welcome me.

WON has created an episodic TV experience with its weekly Cypher.

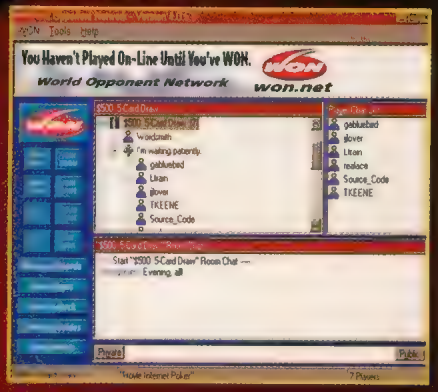
from Detroit. Also, thanks to its recent assimilation of Bezerk.com, WON now hosts the king and progenitor of all Internet game shows, You Don't Know Jack: The Netshow.

Okay, it also supports Outpost 2. But that doesn't mean you have to play it.

The drawback? Well, as I mentioned, it offers few non-Sierra titles. Occasional disconnects and speed variations add a bit of frustration to otherwise intense play. And don't even bother playing the party games in Leisure Suit Larry's Casino unless you feel like wading through chortling 14-year-olds who think that "pecker" is the funniest word ever invented. Otherwise, it's a spiffy place to spend some quality time.


Question
$3,000
Suppose the Book-of-the-Month Club™ actually sends you a copy of the book "Junk Mail." Who is that month's featured author?
3. William Burroughs
three

Every week, WON's exclusive Netshow will teach you and up to two of your friends that You Don't Know Jack.



URL: *www.won.net*
Price: Free shareware and retail game matchmaking, exclusive games
Subscribers: 1,000,000
Games: Cyberstorm, The Cypher, Football Pro, Golf Pro '98 (Golf Pro '99 when it ships), Half-Life, Hoyle Casino, Quake II, Spirit Wars, Starsiege: Tribes, SWAT 2, Trophy Bass 2, Unreal, You Don't Know Jack: The Netshow, others
Alliances: Berkeley Systems, Blizzard, Sierra
Architecture: Peer-to-peer matchmaking, some server-based games, servers distributed across the U.S.
Performance: Speed varies, reasonably intuitive interface, occasional disconnects and outages
Gimmick: Extensive additional content, including articles, hints, and Web-based episodic games
Community: Casual to hardcore, varies by game, very helpful moderators
Grade: B

Where to play?

Of all the services we gamed in, we were most impressed with the Zone. It has an ever-expanding roster of today's hottest games, an intuitive interface, and generally decent performance. Plus, you don't have to bust out your credit card before you start fragging. Sure, there are benefits for paying to play in a ready-made online community, like unusual games you can't find anywhere else, the thrill of competing in organized tournaments, and expert help for the newbies. And it's certain these services will create more gimmicks to try to increase and retain their hold on the online-gaming front. But as long we're getting great online action (at the Zone and other places) without a monthly price tag, we'll spend our $20 on Jolt and Ho-Hos to fuel our late-night, free gaming sessions on the Net. ■

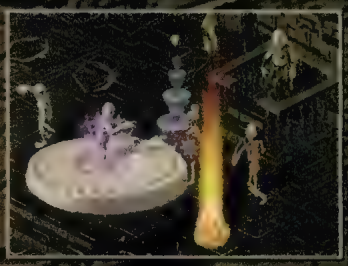
From Mythos Games, the creators of the legendary X-com series, comes another addictive real time strategy game that will take you beyond human limits...

MAGIC & MAYHEM

You are all-powerful.

Release your magic against opposing sorcerers and monsters. Dispatch fireballs against your foes, invoke the apocalypse against their beasts, and infect your opponent's forces with disease. Avoid traps, solve mysteries, gather artifacts. Get ready for the quest of a lifetime...

- Summon more than 25 mighty creatures
- Battle through 36 regions and three arcane realms
- Create deadly combinations with over 60 spells
- Fast adaptive Artificial Intelligence
- No two games ever the same
- Addictive multi-player mode
- Bewitching sound track



summon your powers

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IT'S HELL

BEING A GAME DESIGNER

We know you'd love to wind up in the gaming industry. It'd be a near-perfect existence, right? Well, it's not all Quake and cotton candy. Sure, it's a dream come true, but sometimes even dreams can be a bit of a nightmare. We're going to look at some of the specific challenges and trials faced by folks in a range of jobs in the industry, from this month's focus on game designers to future profiles on programmers, artists, and producers.

By Joel Strauch

From the initial brainstorming session to making sure their game finds room on store shelves, designers are at the helm of a game's development. They're like the director of a feature film—and the producer, and the screenwriter, and the best boy, and the grip, and a good chunk of the cast.

They'll tell you that it's not just them, it's their team—and they're right. But the designers are the ones who have to keep the team moving in the right direction, sell the idea to the corporate powers that be, make sure deadlines are met and budgets managed, and ultimately lead the game home to the promised land of massive sales and gamer satisfaction.

It's a monstrous responsibility, birthing an idea into a living, breathing game that makes everyone happy—from gamers to producers and publishers. The designers I talked to were quick to point out that it's the best job in the world and claim they wouldn't give it up for anything. There are, however, rough edges on this silver-lined cloud. Whether it's an uninspired team going through the motions to get a game on the shelf or sacrificing personal life on the altar of game design, life as a designer isn't quite as idyllic as you might think.

"It was a two-year gamble...a big dice toss."
–Phil Steinmeyer

Challenge the course

Phil Steinmeyer, president of PopTop Software and designer of Railroad Tycoon II, says his biggest challenge was "spending two years staring at the same damn game."

"Nobody plays a game for two years, 10 hours a day—a game that 95 percent of the time doesn't work very well. There's no surprises in it because you wrote it, and you spend the first 16 months wondering if anybody's gonna care about it when it comes out."

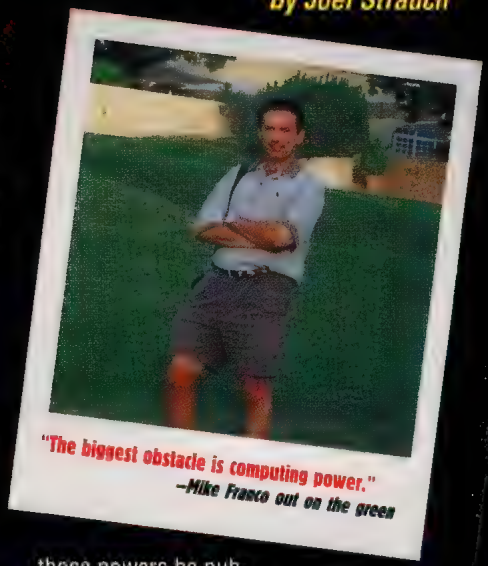
And these long hours start to affect your "life" outside the game.

For most of those two years, Steinmeyer says he was working 60 or more hours a week—80 hours for the last two months. "I hadn't mowed my lawn the last four weeks because I didn't want to take 45 minutes out of my time," he says.

Your normal life will collapse, agrees Aaron Boucher, who spent three years designing Evil Core out of his bedroom. "I had a second job where I was setting up networks and building PCs, but I had to give all that up because I was working 20 hours a day designing."

Publisher problems

Often, designers will find themselves power-[illegible] with the powers that be, whether those powers be publishers, licensees, or celebrities.

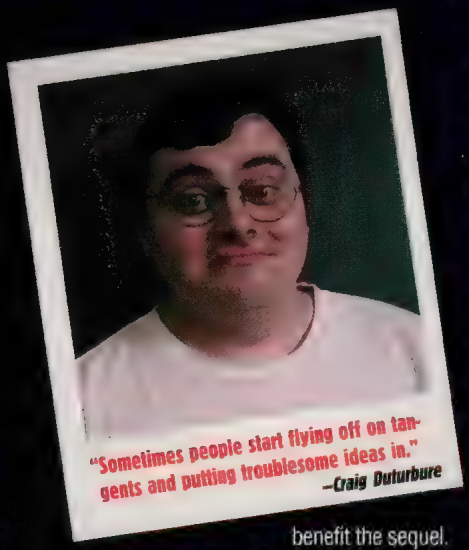


"The biggest obstacle is computing power."
–Mike Franco out on the green

"The biggest frustration I faced was when I found out that Accolade wanted to sell off the rights to the Jack Nicklaus golf license a year ago," says Mike Franco, executive producer and lead designer of Jack Nicklaus Presents: Golden Bear Challenge for Hypnos Entertainment. "Luckily, the president of Accolade included me in the package, so it was a big motivation for me to keep it alive and going when it went over to Activision."

While selling a franchise is fairly rare, publishers meddling with a game's design is fairly common. Ken Levine, lead designer for System Shock II and president of Irrational Games, had some publisher pressure to make the game more like a traditional first-person shooter, a direction he didn't feel was appropriate.

He argued that System Shock's depth accounted for its popularity and would also



"Sometimes people start flying off on tangents and putting troublesome ideas in."
–Craig Duturbure

benefit the sequel.

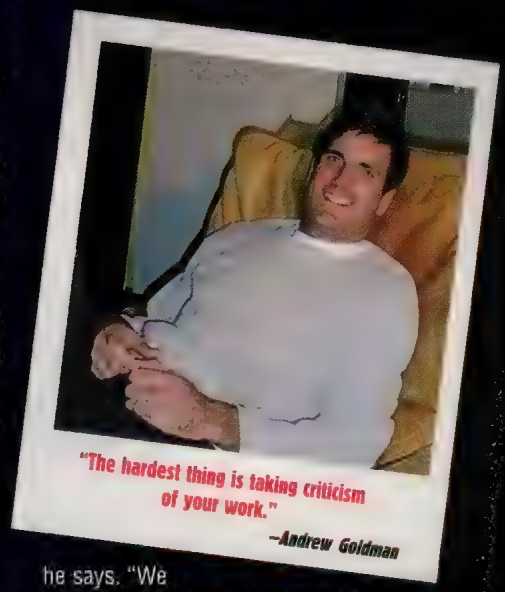
"The richness comes from the flexibility we give to players in how they develop their characters and approach the hairy situations the game throws at them," Levine says. The publishers bought the argument.

Tweaking designs isn't always restricted to publishers. "It's really annoying when senior management people or producers on other teams come up with ideas that may not be true to your original vision," says Robert Stevenson, lead designer on Red Fury for iMagic.

It happens to everybody, and sometimes, to satisfy the suits, you just have to add some features that you may not have planned on. "If your company is moving in an online direction, you may have to include massively multiplayer support when that wasn't how you viewed your game originally," Stevenson says.

Sometimes the powers that be are celebrities who have licensed their persona to a game. "The first time I met Jack Nicklaus was at the AT&T Pebble Beach tournament two years ago. We were supposed to show him a demo of Jack 4 at 5 o'clock, and he was two hours late. We ended up showing it to his son because Jack was like, 'Eh? Whatever,'" says Franco. "My first impression was this guy's an old grump. Luckily, I've worked with him several times since, and he's been great. It turns out he'd had a s—tty day on the course and was pissed off that he couldn't play Pebble that day.

"I know what that's like. If I have a bad day on the course, I'm in a crappy mood too. I was just glad that I got to meet him again and that wasn't my only impression."



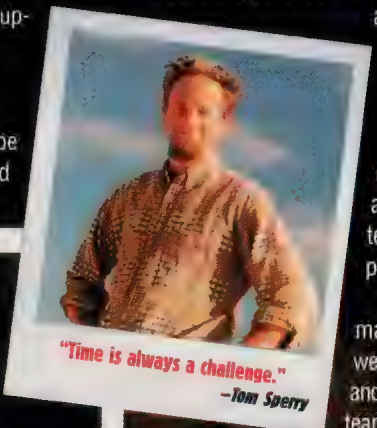
"The hardest thing is taking criticism of your work."
–Andrew Goldman

Teamplay

Everyone knows designing a game is a team effort, but even if you've managed to put together the perfect group of enthusiastic, clever, and talented people, it can be tricky to keep them working smoothly together.

"Managing people is an acquired skill. It's not something they'll teach you in college, and this is where a lot of companies fail," says Tom Sperry, lead designer and project director of Flight Unlimited III for Looking Glass Studios.

Craig Duturbure, the Melbourne House designer of KKND2: Krossfire, says that even being surrounded by talent can induce headaches. "Everyone's got their own vision of how a project should go. There are constant arguments and intra-office email wars."



"Time is always a challenge."
–Tom Sperry

A few email wars between talented team members beats an uncaring team any day, though. If the team's apathetic, the product can suffer.

"When we were making Spycraft, we were using a lot of FMV, and a lot of people on the team didn't like the idea of working on a game with lots of video. We had problems keeping everyone focused, and nobody believed in the product," says Andrew Goldman, design director of Battlezone and Spycraft for Activision, and founder of Activision off-shoot Pandemic Studios.

"With Battlezone, we could play the game multiplayer right away and everyone loved it and believed in it and thought it was going to be the best product ever," he says. "We had a team that really coalesced."

Still want in?

If the thought of long hours, changing visions, and motivational difficulties have elicited an even stronger sadistic yearning for a life as a game designer, these folks have some suggestions for working your way in. (1) Get some experience in the industry, in any capacity. (2) Work your way in as a programmer or an artist. (3) Create levels for existing games and use them to get yourself noticed.

And once you've broken in, Franco has a way to make sure you'll be a great designer who's on top of what defines success in this industry: "Play games, play games, and play games. My advice would be to play games."

Sounds like a great place to get started.

NEXT MONTH:

It's Hell Being a Quality Assurance Tester

"Every minute you're doing eye candy, you're not working on making the gameplay richer, varied, and more nonlinear."
–Ken Levine

"There is never any time when it's a 35- to 40-hour work week."
–Robert Stevenson

LIONHEAD DIARIES

STEVE JACKSON

In Part X of his chronicle, Steve Jackson evaluates Lionhead's first "real" year and explains the studio's plan for helping other developers get started.

Satellites and the Year That Was

It's 1999, and there is a new sense of urgency at the Lionhead offices—one which seems to have arisen spontaneously the moment we got back after Christmas. For this is the year in which Black & White, our first game, will ship. The thought of actually releasing the game we've been working on for 18 months scares us all to death.

The last year has been monumental. At the start of 1998, we were still working out of a cramped office in Peter Molyneux's house. Now we have luxurious open-plan offices on the Surrey Research Park. A year ago, there was virtually nothing to see of the game—a block-built "creature" sliding around over a wireframe landscape. Now we have fully articulated creatures stomping across beautiful countrysides and through villages, picking up villagers and animals to eat, or tossing them over their shoulders. Flowing hair swings naturally as they turn their heads from side to side.

From a primitive testbed to detailed creatures in lush environments, Black & White has come a long way in a year.

The Golden Rule

During this time, the team has grown from eight to seventeen. Five artists, two engine programmers, five game programmers, and a sound programmer form the core. This motley crew is drawn from all walks of life. Lionhead's staff includes rock-band members, a disc jockey, a model for Pretty Polly tights, Cambridge graduates, vegetarians, gays, a motorcycle dispatch rider (for a company coincidentally called Black & White Couriers). You name it, we've got one at Lionhead. But the chemistry works amazingly well. There are no cliques, and on a professional level, everyone respects everyone else's skills.

As if expanding to 17 wasn't enough in 1998, we also established our first two Satellite teams. Right from the start, Lionhead received inquiries from people about whether we'd be interested in game designs or could help with funding new projects. The answer to both questions was no. After all, we had our own game to complete. But Peter can never say no to anyone. He would invite these people over and spend two or three hours discussing their ideas. To my continual consternation, these meetings wasted many hours of valuable Lionhead time. And none of them ever amounted to anything. But in a curious way, they were probably responsible for Lionhead's Satellite scheme coming about.

You see, Lionhead has a golden rule when it comes to growing the company. We will never exceed 20 to 25 staff. Any more, and the whole "team spirit" working atmosphere is lost. With too many people, departments become cliquey and, for example, socialize on their own instead of inviting everyone else. But with 25 staff, Lionhead could only ever be working on one game at a time. This means a new Lionhead game would only appear once every two years—a depressing thought.

Plan into orbit

The basic Satellite idea, conceived by Mark Webley and myself, was that we bring outside development groups under the Lionhead wing. We could provide the right groups (strong teams with original game ideas) with all the help and expertise they needed to create their own games. They'd provide the enthusiasm and drive to make it happen. And these would be independent operations—separate limited companies—rather than Lionhead employees. Lionhead would receive a modest stake, and if the scheme worked out, a new Lionhead-related game could be appearing every six months instead of once every two years.

The Satellite scheme has turned out to be really popular and not just with developers (a new way to get published will always be popular), but also with publishers. We have two Satellite groups on the go, Big Blue Box Studios and Intrepid Developments, and one of our first priorities for 1999 is to get them signed up with their publishing deals. More on these teams and their games in a future Diary.

So all in all we had plenty to celebrate at the end of our first "real" year of operations. This we did in fine style at Molyneux Mansion the Friday before Christmas, at our end-of-year party. Plenty of drink and silly games kept the party going. The evening's most memorable moment was a card game in which everyone had a chance of winning either a lottery ticket (75 percent chance) or a forfeit. To whoops of delight from the jeering crowds, Peter's turn came about. He drew a forfeit and had to throw himself into his swimming pool, fully clothed. A perfect end to the year?

NEXT MONTH: Back to our promised Diary order as Peter and company program game AI.

WHAT WE'RE PLAYING

It seemed to take an eon to get our hands on Alpha Centauri. Now that it's finally here, these other games can barely pull us away from Sid's newest black hole of gaming fun.

1. Alpha Centauri
2. Baldur's Gate
3. Myth II
4. Half-Life
5. Starsiege: Tribes

Making the *PC Games* A-List is the ultimate honor. If it appears here, the game's not just good, it *rocks*. For the complete rundown of every title that's aced its exam, visit **www.pcgames.com/Alist**.

THIS MONTH

Name	Section	Publisher
Alpha Centauri	Game of the Month	EA/Origin
Abe's Exoddus	Adventure	GT Interactive
Close Combat III	Strategy	Microsoft
Magic & Mayhem	Strategy	Bethesda Softworks

OUR FAVORITE A-LISTERS

Name	Issue Reviewed	Publisher
Falcon 4.0	March 1999	Hasbro Interactive
FIFA 99	March 1999	EA Sports
Heretic II	March 1999	Activision
Myth II: Soulblighter	March 1999	Bungie
Wargasm	March 1999	Infogrames
Half-Life	February 1999	Sierra
Railroad Tycoon II	February 1999	g.o.d.
Fallout 2	January 1999	Interplay
Grim Fandango	January 1999	LucasArts
Madden NFL 99	December 1998	Electronic Arts
Need for Speed III	December 1998	Electronic Arts
NHL 99	December 1998	EA Sports
Descent: Freespace	September 1998	Interplay
Unreal	September 1998	GT Interactive
Battlezone	August 1998	Activision
Quake II	March 1998	Activision
MDK	June 1997	Shiny Entertainment
Diablo	February 1997	Blizzard

HOW WE RATE GAMES

Here at *PC Games* we use a letter-grade system to rate games. Everyone knows what our grades mean without needing an in-depth explanation or clever chart: an A+ is the best score possible and an F is a complete bust. To give you a better feel for the overall quality of a title, we rate each game in six key areas. We also select a Game of the Month for each issue. We review games when and only when the makers say they're ready for review.

GAME of the MONTH: The *PC Games* Game of the Month is the one title among the month's releases that stands out from the rest. While it's generally the best overall game of the month, a game will occasionally warrant this honor not because it's the highest-rated game in the issue, but because it's a standout in one or more areas.

GAMEPLAY: In a nutshell, how much fun is it to play? This takes into account the quality of the game's interface and control scheme, and is weighted more heavily than other ratings in the overall grade.

GETTING STARTED: How much reading, studying, and hardware-tweaking are required before you can start to have fun? (The less the better.)

GRAPHICS: How advanced and attractive are the game's visual elements, and how well do they serve the game? If a game's 3D-accelerated graphics are significantly different than its standard look, we offer separate grades.

MULTIPLAYER: How much value will you get from the game's multiplayer element, if there is one? (N/A = not available) This rating takes into account ease of multiplayer setup.

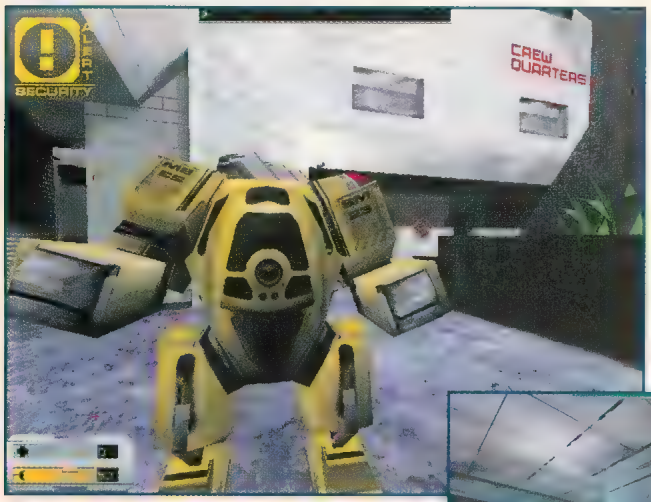
SOUND CHECK: How good are the game's sounds and musical score, and how well do they serve the game?

OVERALL GRADE: All in all, how strongly do we recommend the game for purchase?

System Shock II

The sequel looks lovely, dark and deep

By Peter Olafson



Don't worry too much about this fellow. He'll blow up just fine on his own.

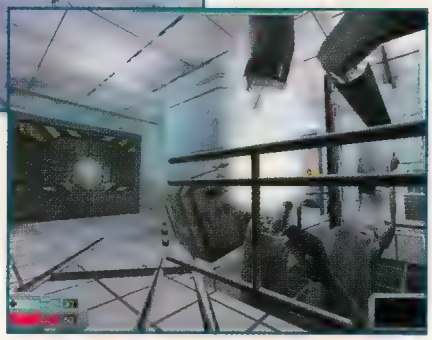
System Shock was one long lost weekend. I finished Looking Glass' incandescent action/adventure over a run of late nights and early mornings. It was my job, it was my chores, it was everything. I could not have put it down even if I had wanted to put it down. It was almost physically impossible.

Experience with an alpha version of System Shock II suggests it is destined to follow in the footsteps of its predecessor...and for many of the same reasons.

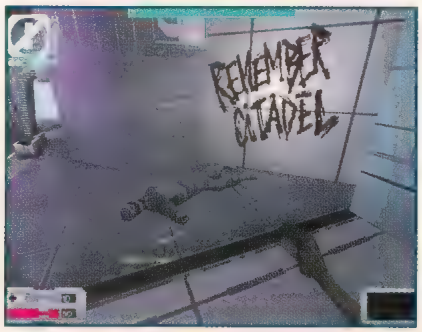
One is that I can't easily classify it. Every time I think I have it pinned down, it dodges. Like System Shock, SSII is a first-person shooter that doesn't feel quite like a first-person shooter, an RPG that doesn't feel quite like an RPG. In some ways, it's an adventure game. But not quite.

System Shock II just *is*, and, on the early evidence, it just works. Like its predecessor, it uses an indirect form of storytelling that shows us the outline of a plot instead of telling it to us—allowing us to put the story together in our own minds from found emails, logs, and notes. It offers up an intimidating twilight densely populated with doorways leading every which way, threatening creatures, and machines and items exotic, familiar, and just gross. (It's amazingly *full*, this one.) It has the visceral feel of a place, not a game.

That place, initially, is the cryogenics section of the first faster-than-light ship, recently returned from a mission to check out a distress call from a distant planet. You'll awake to discover your generated character—a MegaTraveller-like feature not available in my build—has been fixed up with military-grade cybernetic implants, and bloody bodies and the odd severed head decorate the corridors of the starship *Von Braun*.



The ship on which SSII opens seems to be falling apart—sometimes right in front of you.



How could we *forget* the space station from System Shock? Reminders are everywhere in SSII.

The long and the short of it: She's baaaack—"she" being Shodan, the rogue AI dispatched in cyberspace at the end of System Shock.

And yet the game doesn't simply repeat itself. The interface and command set are more manageable; it's all easy point-and-click. I found my way through the early part of the game—opening doors, grabbing items, improving my software and skills, even dabbling in research—with only the briefest look at the docs. The emails and logs that were the foundation of the first game are abetted here by videos and apparitions—ghosts still playing out some scene they played in life. In feel, it's a bigger, rangier game than its predecessor—a science-fiction Thief, in some respects. (In System Shock, I always felt somehow compressed by the cumulative weight of the levels above me.)

But it's still remarkably detailed. You'll find view-screens, evidence of damage, and signs of a workaday world everywhere. And an abundance of context-sensitive sound effects managed to make me feel I was really hearing something happening, not just the output of some sound file.

I'm happy to see one planned improvement has been softened. SSII was originally conceived as a more-explicit RPG in the style of Looking Glass' Ultima Underworld games. But the original game managed to capture that sensibility without the trappings of levels and experience points, and the implants here provide a logical context, rather than an artificial conceit, for character improvement. I'm not playing a game so much as a role.

Uh-oh. That old feeling of lost late nights and early mornings is sneaking up on me all over again.

SYSTEM SHOCK II

DEVELOPER:	Irrational Games and Looking Glass Studios
PUBLISHER:	Electronic Arts
WEB:	www.lglass.com
AVAILABLE:	Late Spring 1999

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The Wheel of Time

Looks ready to roll

By Willem Knibbe

When we first heard about Wheel of Time, the upcoming action/strategy/RPG hybrid from Legend Entertainment, we assumed we were in for a great story set in lush worlds. The game is, after all, based on fantasy novelist Robert Jordan's universe and uses the Unreal engine. What we didn't expect was a focus on unique multiplayer capabilities.

"The single-player game really sets the stage for multiplayer, and we hope when people finish the game, they'll go hop on a server," says Jason Schreiber, producer for Wheel publisher GT Interactive.

While the Arena multiplayer mode plays like a straight deathmatch (find the spells, slay your opponents), the primary multiplayer mode involves an interesting mix of tactics, twitch, and CTF—or perhaps I should say CTS, as the objective is to find your opponents' seals and bring them back to your throne room, all the while protecting your own seals.

Citadels and Angreal

You and up to three others begin the game in separate Citadels and spend a set amount of time in "editor mode," which allows you to easily zoom in and around your Citadel to hide your seals and fortify your fortress. Fortifications include walls, spear traps, pits, collapsing staircases, and the like; and setting up your castle is reminiscent of plotting defenses for your base in an RTS game.

This screen lets you set traps in your citadel.

In addition to physical traps, you can place Myrddraal captains and orc-like grunts known as Trollocs. The former can order Trollocs around, and you can order Myrddraals around, setting them to sound an alarm when a room is breached, or to go and get help, then attack. The Myrddraal will then go round up the Trollocs, and intruders will have their hands full.

After the prescribed time (determined by the server), the game itself begins. Playing as a character from one of four factions in Jordan's universe (the Amyrlin Seat, leader of the Children of Light, the Forsaken, or the Hound), you'll venture forth from your Citadel searching the land for Angreal, artifacts that carry finite spell charges. Then you'll try to get past your opponents' defenses and steal the seals. You can only carry one at a time, which complicates matters.

There are roughly 30 spells in the game, fairly evenly divided between offensive, defensive, and miscellaneous.

"It's not about firing the biggest gun first," Schreiber says. "It's knowing to use the right spell at the right time, and you can see spells coming and have a chance to react."

The more powerful the spell, the more slowly it moves—giving you ample time to cast a defensive spell. Say your opponent attacks with Decay, which eats away at your spell charges. If you cast Swap Places, your attacker will suddenly find himself in your shoes. Cast Reflect, and the spell bounces off you and goes after them. Fork sends a duplicate at the caster, though you'll still suffer the consequences.

Spells can also be combined. One such deadly combo is AutoTarget plus Seeker. This will float around the level until it finds someone, then chase them mercilessly up and down stairs, around corners, inside and outside.

Legend knows the Unreal engine: Wheel of Time's effects and environments are gorgeous.

The Story

The single-player game, set about 100 years before the Jordan books, casts you as one of the Aes Sedai, a group of female spellcasters. You'll traverse 15 large levels (FMV sequences introduce and propel the story) across locations familiar to Jordan fans (Tar Valon, Shadar Logoth, The Stone of Tear) in your quest to find the seals that in the Jordan mythology keep the Dark One at bay.

While not a strict RPG in the sense that you have experience-and hit-points, RPG-like character interactions will crop up as you attempt to learn about the world and discover other groups' motivations and intentions.

The locales themselves look stunning. Unreal II developer Legend, recently acquired by GT Interactive, clearly has a feel for the Unreal engine and has even improved some components. The redone particle-system allows for great effects, like embers mingling with a campfire's smoke as insects buzz around an outdoor light.

Wheel of Time looks like a winner both for Jordan fans and those craving a slightly different first-person gaming experience.

THE WHEEL OF TIME

PUBLISHER:	Legend Entertainment
WEB:	www.wheeloftime.com
AVAILABLE:	May 1999

Drakan: Order of the Flame

Between Arokh and a hard place

By Chris Hudak

Drakan: Order of the Flame will come as a welcome, visceral relief to gamers who are into the whole high-fantasy thing. For too long, these people have had to scuttle and bitch and moan at the fringes of the action-game genre. Oh sure, they've got Hexen and, um, Zelda, Myth, and some others, and metric tons of RPGs, but they've never really gotten the chance to wail and scream and bang their heads and air-lute like the Dukers and Quakers and Half-Lifers—until now.

What at first glance appears to be Ye Olde Tombe Raidre is, upon closer inspection, a sprawling, rollicking fantasy action/adventure game with a new and dizzying twist: air combat with flying dragons. Rynn is a nimble, under-clad warrior who—while no schlub on her own two feet—becomes a whole new class of threat when she mounts her dragon buddy Arokh. In familiar follow-cam style, Drakan players can soar up into the sky, getting an aerial view of the local terrain, engaging in windborne jousts with other dragon-riders or—one of the coolest parts of the game—simply strafing relatively helpless earthbound ogres and trolls and whatnot. Of course, not *all* of those landlubbing lugs are totally useless, and occasionally they'll be shooting back with ludicrously high-arc ballistae, trebuchets, and howitzer-scale crossbows.

Battles at moments like these take on a queerly timeless tone: One minute you're a flapping, fire-breathing Fokker DR-1 following your airborne enemies into a hard wingover, the next you're a scaly Stuka dive-bombing trench grunts from out of the sun, and the next you're on the ground, berzerking your way into the fray like something out of *Braveheart* or the Japanese feudal wars.

As if there weren't enough to worry about on the ground.

Drakan features over 50 hand-held weapons and just seven types of magic spells. Of course, when Rynn's on foot, she lacks the defense bonus of the physical-psychic link she enjoys while riding the dragon, so you must be careful. That dragon won't fit into just any crack or doorway, and sometimes you've just gotta take chances.

The rider/steed combination. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Fantasy buffs would come away panting but unfulfilled if Drakan were just a fighting game, however, so adventure elements are here too. You'll find both physical puzzles indoors and out (including some fairly gruesome discoveries of slaughtered innocents hanging on unpleasant Dark Age contraptions) as well as scripted dramatic scenes that move the story along. (The plot involves Rynn leaving her village to search for her kidnapped brother and foil a scheme that threatens the world's very existence.)

The vast 3D lands she'll traverse include the environments you might expect—flickering-lamp dungeons, glacial wastes, rickety footbridges, etc.—plus one or two really strange ones, like a plain overrun with huge, twisting, building-thick vines like something off the cover of a '70s rock album. As Rynn explores her world and gathers new weapons, her onscreen image alters to reflect the new equipment. Early builds allowed her to pick up the nasty, knobbly clubs wielded by fallen orc-thingies, yielding the rewardingly ridiculous sight of lanky Rynn carrying around a Bam-Bam style skull-cracker twice her girth.

Such large and detailed environs—don't forget to torch a few trees while you're at it—would be wasted without decent multiplayer support, and up to eight dragonriders can battle it out over Internet or LAN, scouring the skies, exploring treacherous out-of-the-way mountain trails on foot, or scurrying into caves and crevices for secrets. Multiplayer modes let you fight on dragons, on foot, or in a Queen of the Dragon scenario where you start on foot and find an artifact that lets you fly the level's one dragon while the others search for cover.

It's still not clear how the single-player epic shakes down in terms of worlds, episodes, and what have you, but the developers have obviously created this world with an eye, ear, and soul for the gamer who wants to take a good, long look around before the violence begins. Fantasy gamers, hearken: The warrior heroine of Drakan is come, and just when you think you've got her cornered, don't be surprised if there's a low, unpleasant, sulfurous growl from right behind you.

DRAKAN

Developer:	Surreal Studios
Publisher:	Psygnosis
Web:	www.psygnosis.com/drakan/
Available:	May 1999

GAME OF THE MONTH

Alpha Centauri

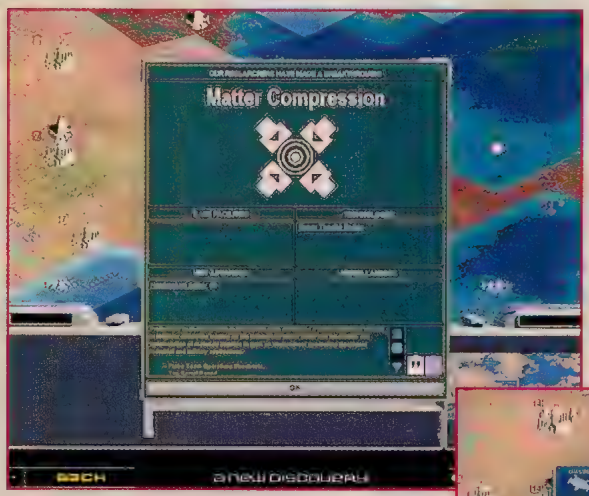
Sid in space

By Daniel Morris

I could barely contain my anticipation when the most respected designer in the industry announced a new development company, Firaxis Games, and unveiled a title that essentially sent Civilization into the 22nd century. Now that Alpha Centauri is here, it serves as a welcome reminder that some guys just flat-out know how to make a great game.

To be fair, Alpha Centauri sports a credit marking it "A Brian Reynolds Design," but the fabric of this game is all Sid Meier. His fingerprints are all over both the form and content of this epic strategy space-opera, which, like the Civilization games before it, manages to be both fun and formidable.

The story begins shortly after the turn of the millennium, when the United Nations kick-starts a plan to rescue humanity from the strife that has engulfed Earth. Assembling a selection of leaders, scientists, philosophers, businessmen, theologists, and soldiers, the U.N. loads this nucleus of human achievement into a starfaring ship called the *Unity*.



Scientific breakthroughs keep your society on the leading edge of progress.

The ship blasts off for Alpha Centauri—a habitable planet orbiting the primary sun of the nearby solar system. Sounds like the genesis of a perfect new society.

Perhaps not. In a Stanley Kubrick–like twist, a reactor malfunctions on board the *Unity*. The resulting crisis splinters the crew into seven factions organized around a leader in each of the disciplines (business, science, military, and so forth). As the *Unity* reaches the new world, referred to simply as Planet, the factions decide to go their own ways—each to colonize a different part of the surface. The opening cinematic concludes with the seven landing pods breaking away from the ship.

Your game begins in 2100 A.D., with each turn moving the calendar forward a year, as in Civilization. The first step is to customize your game: You can select a faction, its goals and strengths, and set the particulars for the new world you'll be conquering.

Except that conquer isn't quite the right word. Alpha Centauri is deeper than that, and smarter. The game can be won through military conquest. It can be won through diplomatic negotiation. It can be won through economic wealth. It can even be won by pure spiritual transcendence.

Design new units to the specifics of your strategic needs.

The tree-huggy base of the touchy-feely Gaians.

Whoa. Not your daddy's wargame, ladies and gentlemen. As your faction establishes its first base and begins exploring, terraforming, and settling, you'll get many flashes of Civilization. The basics are broadened here to address the colorful realities of interplanetary migration; in addition to the usual base-building and city maintenance, you'll have to cope with the exotic crises that surface on this alien world.

The design team had some real fun throwing these extraterrestrial curveballs. The Mind Worms, for instance, slither to your bases to attack by paralyzing your citizens with fear, then burrowing into their skulls to lay larvae in their brains. Not pretty. Fields of xenofungus throw natural barriers in the way of your terraformers.

But the real enemy, as the game constantly suggests, is the human intruder. You'll reestablish contact with the faction leaders and begin the depressingly human exercises of negotiation, intimidation, and inevitable military conflict. Trade and commerce are necessary to the growth of your society, and you'll open trade routes with other groups.

The leaders are modeled on subtle and interesting personality schemes. The lovey-dovey religious lady is a ruthless war-maker when she gets into a conflict. The brainy scientist can occasionally demonstrate a

profound arrogance that makes his scientific breakthroughs a terrifying threat to his neighbors.

One especially nice quality of Alpha Centauri is that it successfully juggles depth and richness with simplicity of play. It has a 250-page manual that you probably won't ever really need to read. Tutorials and in-game pointers keep you on track and introduce you to new features as they pop up in the unfolding game.

Combat extends to land, air, and even sea.

I kept being wowed at the subtly misanthropic theme that spreads throughout Alpha Centauri. As your society grows and expands, it also becomes noticeably less efficient. Bases waste a growing percentage of their resources—all reflecting what the designers call "the principle of diminishing returns," shorthand for programming in the self-negating tendencies of human nature. You spend a lot of your time fighting off these ageless threats to utopia with the ageless promises of technological advancement. And as the tech gets more and more complicated, so do the problems.

The science and technology of Alpha Centauri makes for a creative science-fiction backdrop (even if it's sometimes a little too reminiscent of the Master of Orion tech tree). Nonlinear mathematics, empathic psi-tech, chaos guns that take the "superstring" theory of chaos physics and turn it into a devastating tool of war—the list is long and varied. Einstein's advice to scientists, that they "work for the benefit of mankind...never forget this, amid all your rods and gauges and equations," keeps coming to mind as the race toward the technological, theoretical, and philosophical endgame progresses.

The election of the governor from among the Planetary Council.

And what an endgame. The real brilliance of Alpha Centauri is not in its nuts and bolts, which are quite honestly not a big leap beyond what we've played in previous god games. Its brilliance is in a seamless and convincing storytelling that begins with the opening cinematic and never stops unfolding, developing, and engaging. With each new expansion, each contact, crisis, and step closer to ultimate resolution, Alpha Centauri is a hell of a yarn. It has the gripping page-turner quality of the best of Isaac Asimov. As the single-player campaign builds to its final showdown, the ramifications of the final theoretical discoveries elevate Alpha Centauri from great strategy game to science-fiction epic.

Alpha Centauri also employs some of the multiplayer features that made Sid Meier's Gettysburg! a lively online experience—simultaneous moves for competing players, plus cooperative play that lets you make treaties and then team up against opponents. Who knows? Maybe seven players will launch a game of Alpha Centauri and develop peacefully alongside one another until they proclaim mutual cooperative victory.

Or maybe they'll break out the chaos guns. I'll bet on the latter. In any event, they'll have a lot of fun doing it. Alpha Centauri is a bright star in Sid Meier's firmament, and an ambitious success for Firaxis.

ALPHA CENTAURI

GAMEPLAY: A
GETTING STARTED: B+
GRAPHICS: B
MULTIPLAYER: A-
SOUND CHECK: B-

A
OVERALL

Epic, Civ-style space-opera that combines solid god-gaming with a flair for science-fiction storytelling.

DEVELOPER: Firaxis
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts/Origin
800-245-4525
WEB: www.ea.com
REQUIRES: P133, 16MB RAM, 60MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED: P200, 32MB RAM
STREET PRICE: $50

TIPS ▼ Make use of the Governor feature, which creates a semi-autonomous administrative control system to keep a base running without your micromanagement. ▼ Be sure to always have a garrison unit in every base. Mind Worms love nothing more than to chow down on undefended bases. ▼ Your first task should be to send Scout Rovers in all directions to recover the scattered resource pods in your area. ▼ Think carefully before committing any atrocities, such as planet-busting, genetic warfare, or nerve-stapling. The Planetary Council will probably gang up to wipe you out. ▼ Morale is a big concern. Build a Command Center in each base to fortify morale against Mind Worm attacks. ▼ Artillery units get an attack bonus when located in elevated terrain, and get a huge attack bonus when attacking naval units. So locate artillery in hills on shores.

Resident Evil 2 Platinum

Fun but flawed zombie hunting

By Michael E. Ryan

Capcom's Resident Evil 2 Platinum is a faithful port from the Sony PlayStation, but the game carries over a ton of console weirdness that may weaken its appeal when placed beside similar PC titles.

As the story begins, zombies spawned by Umbrella Inc., an evil biochemical company, are overrunning the hapless burg of Raccoon City. Chris Redfield, the hero of the first Resident Evil, has gone missing along with the rest of his police comrades. Arriving in Raccoon City in the nick of time, Chris's sister Claire and a rookie cop named Leon must get to the bottom of this crisis and put a stop to Umbrella's sinister plot.

You can play the game as either Claire or Leon, with each character taking a slightly different path through the game. Or you can undertake a mini-adventure (locked in the PSX version) against randomly placed enemies in the Extreme Battle mode, in which you can also play as Chris Redfield or Ada Wong.

For those of you unfamiliar with this series, it's best described as an action-adventure hybrid. The game's third-person action is somewhat reminiscent of Tomb Raider, though the backdrops are all 2D, so your movements are limited much as they are in Grim Fandango and Blade Runner. There are 10 locations in all, including the streets of Raccoon City, the multi-story police station, and the Umbrella labs.

The character models and zombies all look great with a decent 3D card installed. Voodoo2 and RIVA TNT cards make the game look especially nice. Software rendering will work in a pinch, but even a PII 450 chugged through some scenes without 3D hardware help. However, the 2D backgrounds range from bland to ugly regardless of your setup.

Throughout the game, you'll fight your way past a host of zombies and other scary creatures using a variety of weapons ranging from a simple 9 mm to a rocket launcher. Mowing down wave after wave of lumbering zombies can be quite a rush—especially with the Gatling chaingun.

Drilling holes in zombies can be a lot of fun.

In Extreme Battle mode, you control one of four characters on a mini-adventure.

You'll run into numerous locked doors and an array of other relatively tame puzzles that are just tough enough to slow you down without becoming frustrating.

Unfortunately, as in the port of the original Resident Evil, you'll also have to get past the game's many design oddities. For starters, you can only save the game when you come across a typewriter—and then only when you have a typewriter ribbon in your inventory. Many of the puzzles require extensive backtracking. You can carry only six to eight items at a time and must frequently return to the designated storage boxes on each map. You can't even exchange items in your inventory for those you find in your travels, and you can't drop items unless you're at a storage box.

Other issues include the annoying delays whenever you open a door or climb a flight of stairs. And the game intermittently stopped accepting keyboard input when I used that as my primary controller on two different systems. I eventually switched to a gamepad.

So while the zombie-killing action and the mildly challenging puzzles can be quite a blast, the game's many needless gameplay limitations keep it from being in the same class as a Heretic II or Tomb Raider III.

You can play as either Claire or Leon, but you'll run into your counterpart at some point during the game.

RESIDENT EVIL 2 PLATINUM

GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	B+

B- OVERALL

Too many console oddities mar an otherwise decent port.

PUBLISHER:	Capcom Entertainment 408-774-0400
WEB:	www.capcom.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 24MB RAM, 300MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	PII, 64MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3D card
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS ▼ Remember to stockpile those ink ribbons—you need one to save your game. ▼ If you time it right, you can take out multiple zombies with a well-placed grenade. ▼ Make good use of the storage boxes scattered throughout the game; you can't carry very much with you.

Dark Vengeance

Please insert personality

By Peter Olafson

Dark Vengeance is a third-person beater with nothing out of the ordinary to recommend it. It's not an awful game: It runs reliably. It's relatively easy to figure out how to play. It is inoffensive to the eye.

Winding up for the pitch.

Airball!

But the gameplay is thin—lacking strong characteristics that would distinguish it from competition like the three Tomb Raiders, Heretic II, and even Deathtrap Dungeon.

I'll spare you the elaborate story laid out in the jewel-box manual. Suffice it to say you can choose from among three characters (gladiator, trickster, and warlock)— each with nine distinctive weapons, four "uniques" (basically, selectable power-ups), and different starting levels. They do share a destiny. Whichever you select, you're The Chosen One—a prophetic figure whose ultimate fate is uncertain, but who appears to be the last, best hope of the troubled land of Amagar.

Each quest takes you through a significant subset of the game's 16 levels—many of them dark interiors that quickly had me toying with my monitor's brightness controls. (The gamma controls came up as "unavailable" on the video menu on two systems.) Evade or dismantle the enemies (30-plus types, all told), surmount the odd action-oriented puzzle, smash your way through walls, find the keys or key-like objects that clear your path, and move on to next dark level. And so it goes.

Sad to say, this is familiar stuff—too familiar—and I quickly found I wasn't playing so much as going through the motions.

That's not to say Dark Vengeance is without a few clever bits. Weapon swipes leave lingering trails behind them in the air—red when you've made contact and white when you haven't. Your current level's objective is clearly stated in the menu (a nod to games like Quake II). You can apparently join a multiplayer game in 64-player Voyeur mode as a spectator (which has to be more fun than the routine network game we played), and there's team and CTF support. Some of the effects are attractive. The obese demon cherubs and occasional Butt-head–voiced Dark Elves are good for the odd laugh. And the difficulty level seems pretty high. I like a challenge.

My warlock gets his marshmallows toasted.

But, that said, all these are easily separated from the whole, and I can't think of a concrete reason to continue playing Dark Vengeance now that I've written the review. The level design is pedestrian—a standard array of corridors, stairways, ramps, and doors with few surprises. The AI is undistinguished. Enemies move toward you and try to hit you, or they stand at a distance and try to shoot you. They do not run away when hurt, use the power-ups or high-level weapons that are lying around, or behave in any way that suggests an instinct for self-preservation. The artwork is glossy in the 3D-accelerated version, but in a generic way. The story is too convoluted to make us feel part of a world on the one hand, and our introduction to the characters too brief to develop any feeling for them on the other.

Fact is, I just don't *care*.

And that's finally where the game falls down. I couldn't find anything to attach myself to in Dark Vengeance. It's just another third-person action game, and in this increasingly crowded field, "just another" isn't enough.

DARK VENGEANCE

GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	C
SOUND CHECK:	C+

C OVERALL

A three-character, and yet characterless, 3D beat-'em-up.

DEVELOPER:	Reality Bytes
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.gtinteractive.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 50MB HD, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P200 MMX, 32MB RAM, 300MB HD, D3D card
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ The gladiator's a good starter character—if only because you're likely to be familiar with this big brute and his ilk from other games. ▼ The enemy archers can be a real pain—especially when appearing in combination with foot soldiers who creep up and stab you in the back while you're after the bowman. The best way to deal with them is to lure any swordsmen out of view of the archer, dispatch them there, then adopt a serpentine approach to the bowman, using any available cover so you're exposed for the shortest time possible.

Thunder Brigade

A quiet storm

By Danny W. Lam

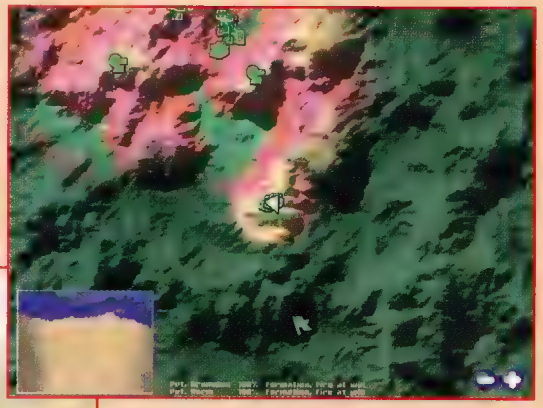
Thunder Brigade's hovertank action just doesn't float. The story isn't bad: A Stargate enables humans to colonize the Hadon and Kildae systems near the center of the galaxy. After a century of peace, rebels of the Hadon system overthrow the government and destroy the Stargate. With no backup from Mother Earth, this Hadon Empire dominates both systems and rules with an iron fist. Over time, the Kildae inhabitants create a resistance movement, the United Systems. All the while, the Earth Alliance keeps close watch on the outcome of the battles between the two groups.

Check out the hovertanks from a third-person perspective.

I guess we humans never learn.

You fight for the United Systems in the 30-mission campaign across 12 environments—spying on the evil empire, taking out enemy tanks, missiles, and radar installations—armed with one of twenty tanks with a subset of the six weapons. On some missions, you'll get help from wingmen (you can issue them commands from a list). You can also edit existing missions or create your own using the included editor. Multiplay is supported for modem and serial, sixteen over a LAN or four over the Net (with one PC acting as a server).

TB uses fractal/voxel technology, so no 3D accelerator is required. While the graphics aren't as sharp as in polygonal, accelerated games, the rendering is more surreal.



Keep your heading with the map and its nifty view-screen in the bottom left.

It all sounds good so far—but when you get into the game itself, it all starts to unravel. Maybe I'm spoiled by great games like Battlezone (an obvious comparison for futuristic tank games), but there are so many bones to pick with TB. The action was decent, but it's basically your standard aim-and-shoot, with nothing more to distinguish it. Fire a missile to take out a radar, destroy the enemy tank before it gets you. TB swiftly stagnates as you embark on mission after repetitive mission. My biggest gripe: Only six weapons? So, in the future, we can create 50-megaton tanks that float, but we can only come up with six weapons with which to arm them?

Controls were also a bit dicey. You can strafe, reverse, and adjust the height at which your tank hovers (so you can hide behind hills), but you can't use your joystick's throttle switch. To keep your tank moving, you have to press and hold the button, and, grrrr, keyboard buttons are non-configurable.

The mission editor was straightforward but also has its flaws. For example, you can't place a bunch of tanks at once; rather, you have to drag and drop each one.

There are some bright spots: While using the map, you can keep an eye on the real-time action via a window on the bottom corner. The storyline is intriguing, multiplay is bug-free, and, to its credit, TB doesn't attempt to be a Battlezone knockoff. Without resource or base management and few strategic elements, TB is a straightforward Battlezone Lite.

However, the limited weaponry, restricted configurations, and less-than-intense action make this game uninviting, simplistic, and... thunder-free.

The Designator weapon can be used to take out entire installations.

THUNDER BRIGADE

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	D
GRAPHICS:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C-
SOUND CHECK:	C-

C- OVERALL

Lightning doesn't strike here

DEVELOPER:	Blue Moon
PUBLISHER:	Interactive Magic 800-789-1534
WEB:	www.imagicgames.com
REQUIRES:	P100, 32MB RAM, 150MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ When sent on a recon mission with a stealth tank, take out those Radar Outposts! Without the radar, the enemy can't track your presence. (Of course, remember to turn your own radar to "passive" as well.) ▼ Don't get up close to a missile tower to destroy it. You can take it out from a distance with a few well-aimed shots. ▼ If your tank is so equipped, the best way to get rid of an enemy tank that's tailing you is to drop a couple of mines. If he's smart, he'll back off. ▼ When all else fails, cheat! Press and hold Alt and F12 to bypass the mission.

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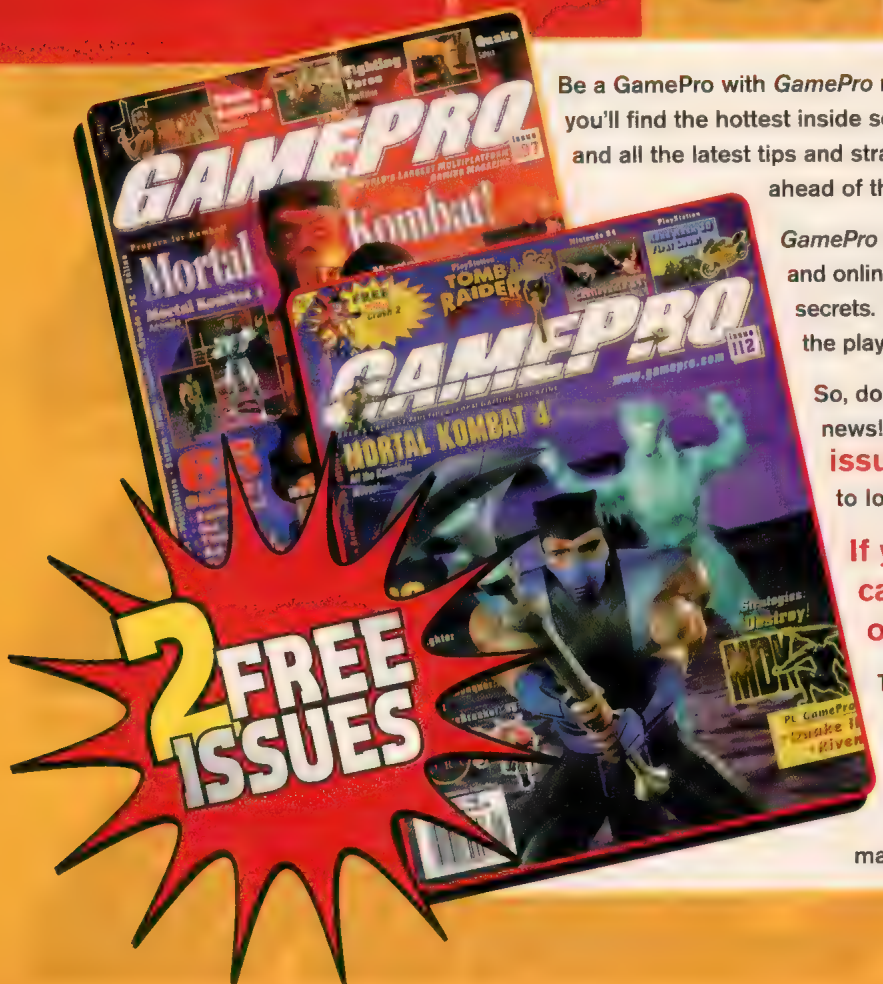

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Magic & Mayhem

Spells, monsters, and RTS fun

By Barry Brenesal

What a relief this game is, after the barrage of C&C wannabes. It's true that Magic & Mayhem is a real-time strategy game, but that's where the resemblance to the clones ends. This one has its own take—and a marvelously clever one at that—on creating armies and fighting the good fight, as you'd expect from the creators of X-COM.

M&M pits your wizard against others over 36 scenarios (roughly two-thirds required, others optional). Along the way, you gradually acquire unique magical items, each of which can be combined with three talisman types (law, neutral, or chaos) to produce specific spells.

At the start, you have three items and three talismans for a total of nine possible spells—three of which you must select before the first scenario. These choices determine your and your opponents' strategies as you duel to the death.

Twenty-one of M&M's spells are summonings: of vampires, knights, zombies, elven archers, and so on. Another 42 spells hand out instant death (Inferno) or sly, delayed death (Pestilence). You can invoke fountains that heal nearby friendly creatures, create totems that attack enemies, and enchant (or disenchant) creatures with protections and enhancements.

Points paid out for good work in the previous scenario can be used to acquire talismans, health points, mana, and an improved capacity for summoning monsters. (Summoning is very important in M&M since monsters grab items for you, guard mana-generating sites, explore, and attack your opponents.)

All the configurable options for a quick battle.

However, if you just want a quick battle, you can play up to three computer or human opponents—the latter via null modem, LAN, or on the Zone (**www.zone.com**)—on 40 multiplayer maps. The multiplayer game is a combination of paranoia (thanks to the constant fog of war), tense exploration for mana and items, and wonderful destruction once you square off against an opponent's wizard.

Brownies, vampires, centaurs, and manticores are but a few of the creatures you can summon to battle.

M&M is a feast for the eyes and ears. The graphics enhance the isometric perspective with imaginative and detailed artwork. Spell effects are great, but the animations are lean. There's a jerkiness to character movements that becomes noticeable when you compare the game to Baldur's Gate. The Afro Celt Sound Systems' background music, melding African rhythms to Celtic melody, is easily the most distinctive in a game since Roland Rizzo's medievally inflected score for Magic: The Gathering.

M&M's interface is also easy to learn, and an in-game tutorial will ease your introduction to the wizardly path. If it's too tough, you can switch difficulty levels—there are four—between scenarios.

On the debit side, the pathfinding isn't great, and you'll need to keep an eye on your creatures to prevent them from getting stuck behind the local flora. M&M is by no means the disaster that Rage of Mages was in this respect, though, and you can always halt the game and issue new commands.

A Phoenix casts its napalm effect.

Strategy vets may recall that M&M (previously known as Duel: The Mage Wars) recaps some elements from Mythos' earlier Lords of Chaos. Still, it takes a canny sense to realize that what's old may become new and fresh again, when applied with creativity. And that's exactly what Magic & Mayhem does.

MAGIC & MAYHEM

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A-

A- OVERALL

Decidedly different and addictive.

DEVELOPER:	Mythos Games
PUBLISHER:	Bethesda Softworks 800-677-0700
WEB:	www.bethsoft.com
REQUIRES:	P133, 16MB RAM, 145MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 32MB RAM, 6x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ The computer AI watches for repeated use of specific spells over multiple scenarios and compensates by preparing appropriate counterspells. Circumvent these tactics by using different groups of spells over successive scenarios. ▼ Try to balance your spell book. This is especially important during the early game, when you enter scenarios with only a few spells to your name. For instance, if you feature two creature summonings, add a Heal or Fireball spell. ▼ The really classy spells with fancy effects like Chain Lightning and Apocalypse cost you quite a bit of mana, so hold off on casting these until within range of your important objectives (taking over mana-producing sites and killing your opponents). Stick with the cheap spells in each scenario at first. ▼ Explore as much as you can, even after you kill your main enemy for each scenario.

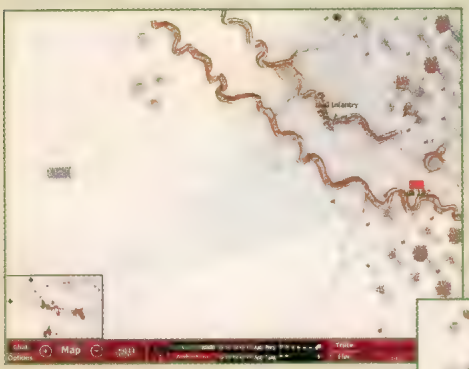
CCIII: The Russian Front

Saving Private Mikhail

By Daniel Morris

It was one of the most destructive campaigns in the history of warfare. On June 22, 1941, the German army plunged into Soviet Russia in a surprise assault called Operation Barbarossa. It ignited a four-year conflict that traversed 3,000 miles to the gates of Moscow before ultimately rolling back to a final conquest of Berlin by the vengeful Red Army. Before the Soviet flag would wave over the Reichstag, more than 22 million people lost their lives, making the Russian Front deadlier in sheer numbers than even the Holocaust.

Microsoft's acclaimed Close Combat series has thus far done a fine job of re-creating squad-level combat in an intense yet sophisticated real-time environment, and CCIII: The Russian Front is developer Atomic Games' best job yet of providing a gripping—and realistic—real-time combat game.



An ambush in two steps. Lure tanks into a kill zone with the promise of an easy infantry target...

The core of Close Combat is preserved using a fine tactical engine that incorporates terrain, elevation, line of sight, structures, trenches, and all manner of battlefield elements. As with previous editions, CCIII features remarkable unit AI; it may be the game's best asset. Troops behave in convincingly human fashion. When their leaders are close by, they can withstand punishing artillery bombardment. When they sense they've been abandoned, they don't think twice about fleeing or surrendering. When they sense the enemy is cracking, they rally and counterattack to exploit the shift in momentum. When pinned down by enemy suppression fire, they duck their heads down, and you can almost hear them pray.

What Russian Front adds to the CC equation is an in-depth, involving "campaign story" that unfolds over the four years of the conflict, played from either side. The operations and campaign modes provide a continuity in that units destroyed or degraded in earlier battles must be refitted or retired. Troops that survive their firefights gain experience and become more valuable, giving you incentive to keep them alive longer and employ them as power pieces. As morale and experience grow and develop, the scope of your command grows from an initial platoon to the full company-level command of a fire brigade, adding teams, technologies, and (if you've been a watchful commander) new and improved tactics.

CCIII beautifully balances the visceral charge of combat with the cerebral demands of battlefield command. One second you're gritting your teeth as you oversee a machine-gun nest mowing down an enemy infantry advance, and the next second your attention has to turn to the new firing pattern for your mortar team. Unlike most RTS games, CCIII unfolds at a very lifelike pace. It's always tense but always manageable.

...then kill the tanks with a pre-planned mortar or anti-tank barrage.

Sound tactics are rewarded. The Russian commander will learn the value of clever ambushes, well-orchestrated fighting retreats, and well-timed flanking counterattacks. The German commander will learn the value of suppressive artillery fire, screened infantry advance, and rapid encirclements with speedy tanks.

German scouts surrender to Russians at a crucial bridge crossing.

The final cherry atop this grognard's dessert is a robust multiplayer feature that allows for painless setup over network, modem, or the Zone. As involving as the single-player campaigns are, there's nothing like routing a human opponent. Luckily, a simple but in-depth scenario editor allows you to play in every conceivable condition, from open summer plains to treacherous winter forests.

Strategy fans will find an embarrassment of riches in Close Combat III: The Russian Front. The campaign may have been hell on earth, but the game is heaven on the computer.

CLOSE COMBAT III

GAMEPLAY:	A
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	A
SOUND CHECK:	B+

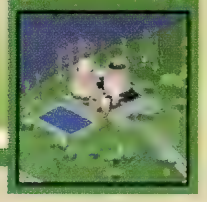
A OVERALL

Top-notch design makes CCIII a vivid and intense squad-level combat sim.

DEVELOPER:	Atomic Games
PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400
WEB:	www.microsoft.com/games/
REQUIRES:	P133, 32MB RAM, 60MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 450MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$55

TIPS

▼ Infantry equipped with grenades can successfully destroy enemy tanks if they get close enough. ▼ Use mortar teams to lay a smoke screen to cover your infantry movements over open ground. ▼ Machine-gun teams make devastating suppressive-fire units, so conceal an MG nest and let them ambush enemies in a wide field of fire. ▼ Infantry dug into foxholes or trenches cannot be overrun by tanks.



SimCity 3000

Minor renovations

By Barry Brenesal

The third release in the SimCity line feels less like a leap forward than a measured step—more like SimCity 2300. Strategy players who have somehow missed earlier versions will certainly want to get this, but otherwise, it's not a mandatory upgrade.

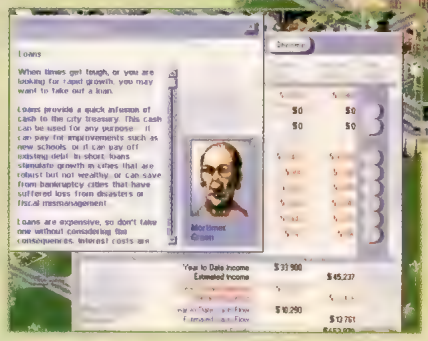
Fundamentally, this is the city-building sim that established a new genre at the turn of the decade. While you clear and zone land, place roads, train stations, and utilities, issue ordinances and set tax rates, it's your Sims (citizens) who decide over time what structures get built and occupied—and demolished or abandoned.

The most obvious change lies in the graphics. SimCity 3000 offers four times the room to build than in the last release, with 3D rendering of structures for multiple views. (This was successfully faked in SimCity 2000.) You can zoom in closer and watch animations of joggers, traffic jams, and buildings under construction.

All this comes at a price, of course. After rotating the map or slowly moving it, I experienced a series of notable pauses as views and locations were gradually recalculated. The kicker is that I'm running on a PII 450 with 120MB RAM and a Diamond Viper 550 card. I'll gladly take bets from anybody who doesn't believe they'll feel the drag more on a slower system.

My reactions to the new interface were also mixed. It's certainly cleaner and more attractive than its predecessor, and the ticker tape at the bottom of the screen really creates a sense of being in the middle of events as they happen. Laying water and electricity is also far easier than before. But I miss the menus with their access by key-combo to various functions. Optional menus should've been made available to those of us who still think hitting two keys is easier than fiddling with a mouse. Different strokes, and all that.

Deals from petitioners offer mixed blessings.



Quick help is always available when you're wrestling with your budget.

However, there can be no question about the value of SimCity 3000's increased level of interactivity with its citizens. As mayor, you have seven advisors (environmental, transportation, and financial among them) who provide detailed suggestions for handling each situation. You'll also receive petitioners from time to time who offer proposals: the addition of a casino, for instance, or a nearby town that wants to buy or sell electricity. Each arrangement has its pros and cons, which helps determine the flavor of your city as it grows.

More animation at the closest zoom level, but not much more.

Frankly, much more of this would've been welcome. Although SimCity 3000 adds a greater variety of graphics for identical buildings, there remains a sense of sameness to it all—an absence of feeling for cities' uniqueness. You can't design a city for people who hate high density, like some Californian towns, or for people who regard public areas and cultural buildings as essential historical sites, as in Paris. And what about cities reliant on local building materials and landscape, like Siena, carved from a mountainside, or Venice, with its canals and pollution problems?

I can't help feeling that Maxis missed the gondola a bit on this one.

SIMCITY 3000

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B-
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	A-

B- OVERALL

A visually appealing but incremental update.

PUBLISHER: Maxis
800-245-4525
WEB: www.maxis.com
REQUIRES: P166, 32MB RAM, 150MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98, NT 4.0
RECOMMENDED: P250, 64MB RAM
STREET PRICE: $50

TIPS ▼ In the beginning of the game, zone light. Don't add medium to heavy zoning in those areas until after you've built up a decent-sized town. ▼ SimCity 2000's variable-rate bonds are gone. Take advantage of the fixed-rate loans instead for a much better deal. ▼ Bowing out of a deal arranged with petitioners snags you a hefty fine, so think long-term before you agree to a huge shopping mall or accept another city's garbage in your landfill. ▼ Trains circumvent traffic jams and pollution, keeping Sims happier and traveling further.

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Powerslide

Tracking the apocalypse

By Peter Olafson

Here's one racing game whose story appears to have been written before the first line of code.

I hear you: "A racer with a story? *Get off my property.*"

Honest: Unlike the vast majority of driving games, which appear to acquire a story line about two weeks before they ship, the tracks in Powerslide are pleasantly faithful to the game's theme.

The theme is bleak. The disappearance of the ozone layer early in the 21st century has led to the near-annihilation of the human race—and given the survivors' unparalleled access to abandoned cars. These have been cannibalized for parts by rebellious racers called Powersliders, and the resultant behemoths are pitted against one another on eight progressively tougher circuits (plus four bonus tracks) in a competition for, uh, fresh fruit. Apparently the hated brussels sprout is the only vegetable that grows in this variously irradiated world.

You pick a car from a roster of muscle-bound buggies, a tranny, and a character from a crew that appears to have been borrowed from Road Rash, then off you go into the desert against up to 11 opponents. Complete a set of tracks at a given difficulty level—there are four—and you'll unlock additional circuits, characters, cars, and type-in cheats. (The first, Burn, allows you to send fiery missiles up your opponents' tailpipes.) They're offered up in a straightforward fashion that doesn't leave you guessing what you may or may not have achieved.

Now, if you play only the early tracks, you'll probably be tempted to blow off Powerslide as another graphically vivid arcade racer. The trek around towers of wind-blown desert stone at game's opening and the simple dirt oval that follows recall Psygnosis' Destruction Derby—a great concept in brutal physics that was done to death by lackluster tracks. They are pretty. They are fast. They are seamless. They are dull.

Someone gave a dam for use as the third track.

The eternal circle of Powerslide's second track.

But stick around for the third go-round, which is based around a beaten-down dam, and you'll find in its rich gray and brown textures and creeping darkness not simply a good challenge, but a persuasive sense of a world that has been allowed to slide into neglect. There's no one around to shovel away the sand, re-lay the concrete, and live in the cities. It's not a place where you'd want to get out of your car, but it's the only racing game that has me slowing down to read the signs.

It's also agreeably open-ended. The desert track allows you to go off-road into a sand-washed ghost town. The dam has some infuriating dead-ends. The brawny mine track has more potential than I had time to explore. (It's almost in Carmageddon territory in terms of complexity.) Even the dirt oval allows you to launch your car into the grandstands and drive around in the aisles.

Now, if they're going to allow us to drive around the bleachers, there really should be something in the bleachers worth finding. By itself, the novelty of being able to do something unconventional isn't enough, and I'd love to see more of this post-apocalyptic world. And on the mine level, with the cars bunched into close quarters at the starting line, the update on my 3D-accelerated P200 MMX was so jarring that I couldn't steer properly and invariably wound up driving into a wall and finishing last.

A sand-washed ghost town beckons in the first track of Powerslide.

But there's more to Powerslide than simply winning. This is one for watching... and experiencing.

POWERSLIDE

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A-
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	B
SOUND CHECK:	B

B
OVERALL

Racing in a well-executed Mad Max world.

DEVELOPER:	Ratbag
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.gtinteractive.com
REQUIRES:	P133 MMX, 16MB RAM, 90MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P233 or K6-2 3D-NOW, 48MB RAM, 260MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$30

TIPS ▼ The car that worked best for me was the Big Heaver—it's a real rocket. But give the slower, more balanced Sabre a look as well. Ultimately, you'll want one that has good traction and speed, as it's in cornering that you'll tend to lose ground. ▼ Devil's Elbow has a notable shortcut: a jump that will save you a couple of turns.

S.C.A.R.S.

This one didn't heal too cleanly

By Joel Strauch

The first thing you notice about S.C.A.R.S. (Super Computer Animal Racing Simulation) is that it feels like a console game (*cough*—Mario Kart—*cough*—pardon me). That's because it *is* a console game—available for both PSX and N64—ported over to the PC.

That heat-seekin' dog will hunt!

The terrains look different, but they drive the same.

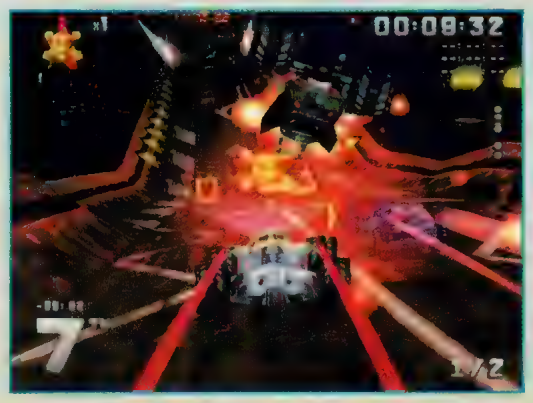
Now, most of the time when you get a port, you'll notice some features have been taken out and others added to adjust to the new platform. But S.C.A.R.S. feels just like you're playing on a box hooked up to your TV.

This has both advantages and disadvantages. The plus side is if you've got a nice gamepad, you get clean, arcade-y action. The minus is you don't get some of the benefits you should from playing on a PC: You can't type in your name or passwords but have to move through the alphabet soup one letter at a time as you would in a console game. In fact, you lose out on the multiplayer side. On N64 or PSX, you can play up to four players split-screen; on the PC, you get two. No LAN play, no Internet play (despite Ubi Soft's online service), nada.

Despite these deportation drawbacks, S.C.A.R.S. is a pretty fun little game for the money (you can pick it up for $12 in the bargain bin). The tracks are enjoyable, if monotonous. Of the three in the first cup race, two are the same. Weather and lighting effects (cool headlights, especially) are thrown in for some variety.

Luckily, you can create your own custom cups using races from cups you've mastered, so you can string together some of the game's nine tracks to keep yourself interested. You can also race against another player in the cups or just animo-y-animo in VS. mode.

The weapons are diverse, including rockets and heat-seekers as well as traps and turbo boosts. And the longer you hold down the fire button, the more powerful the effects get. Instead of animals riding motorized go-carts (which would be a blatant rip-off, you understand), you've got vehicles that mimic different types of animals (ah, so cleverly unique!). You start out with five and have to beat the other four in challenge races before you can use them. It's all detailed in the game's story line, delivered in the same disjointed editorial style characteristic of the manual.



Time Bomb that boy outta your way.

The game's audio tracks, catchy at first and then annoyingly repetitive, match the physical racetracks. For example, the Mountain track features flying saucers floating randomly about and a mock *X-Files* tune. Unfortunately, the races usually last longer than the music, so you often hear the song more than once; and the race pauses when the song loops, which sometimes locked up my system.

Overall, S.C.A.R.S. is an easy-to-pick-up game that the kids'll love and adults will tolerate. It's missing the best part of Mario Kart–esque games—the battle mode—but you can't beat the price.

S.C.A.R.S.

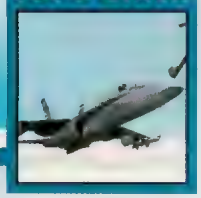
GAMEPLAY:	C+
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	D
SOUND CHECK:	C+

C+ OVERALL

Sorta Cheesy but Available for a Real Steal

DEVELOPER:	Vivid Image
PUBLISHER:	Ubi Soft 800-824-7638
WEB:	www.ubisoft.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 32MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, 3Dfx card or Direct3D, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P200
STREET PRICE:	$12

TIPS ▼ Beat the challenge cars as soon as the race becomes available. It'll make your life easier to have them in your garage. ▼ You can shoot traps in your way, but it's easier and more ammo-conserving to just jump over them. ▼ Get rid of the Time Bomb when there's about five seconds left. You don't want it coming back to you.



Top Gun: Hornet's Nest

The need for speed

By Marc Dultz

Since the earliest days of computer gaming, sim publishers have sought to bring the thrill of air combat to the starry-eyed masses, dispensing with the usual hardcore elements in favor of a more generic, adrenaline-charged experience. In Top Gun: Hornet's Nest, MicroProse has done just that, once again using the film license as the basis for its latest entry-level simulation. But it takes more than a box-office extravaganza to produce a worthwhile game.

This chase perspective incorporates a simplified HUD and one of several available monitor displays.

Like its predecessor Top Gun: Fire at Will, Hornet's Nest features the acting talents of James Tolkan ("Hondo"), who serves as the player's commanding officer on board the aircraft carrier *USS Nimitz*. While Tolkan gives a credible performance, the game and supporting cast crash soon after takeoff.

Given that Top Gun is intended for the masses, you'd think MicroProse would have its Is dotted and Ts crossed, but the game doesn't even work out of the box with a SideWinder joystick (a 2MB fix can be found at **www.microprose.com**).

Although Hornet's Nest is supposedly based upon the U.S. Navy's F/A-18 combat aircraft, there's precious little here that even remotely resembles the actual warbird. The flight model and avionics have been watered down to the point where the game feels more like an arcade shooter than a sim-lite. In terms of weapons performance, virtually every missile-launch eliminates the target. While this bodes well for the prospective pilot, it also means that nearly every enemy SAM launch will find its way to your aircraft, no matter how many flares and/or how much chaff you deploy, or how much evasive maneuvering you undertake. So, after a few successive hits, it's mission over and a quick trip back to the carrier for a nasty debriefing by the cigar-chomping CO.

Top Gun's padlock view is extremely disorienting and never seems to maintain target lock.

Then there's your lone wingman. Nowhere in the manual does it mention anything about communicating with your partner. But if you delve deeply enough into the options panel, you'll discover that you can, in fact, issue orders. But, again, problems crop up. For some reason, no onscreen text complements the four radio commands, which obviously leads to some confusing situations in the heat of battle. Furthermore, your wingman may, from time to time, unwittingly crash into a mountain or the desert floor, even though his gas tanks have been topped off and he was never once fired upon. Perhaps it's his nerves, knowing that he has to fly alongside the inimitable Maverick.

Wave off! Top Gun needs a training mission for landing your multimillion-dollar aircraft on the deck of a carrier.

Finally, there are the aesthetics. Usually games of this ilk try to offer flashy graphics and spectacular special effects to compensate for the relaxed flight- and weapons-modeling. But, even here, Hornet's Nest finishes out of the running. The F/A-18's 20mm cannon sounded more like a helicopter rotor than a fearsome tank killer, and the terrain was often dotted with nothing more than a couple of trees, radar installations, and SAM sites. With the lack of any high-definition detail, it was often difficult to tell where the sky and ground met.

So, while there's certainly nothing wrong with appealing to the casual flight-sim audience, Top Gun: Hornet's Nest just doesn't have what it takes to make the grade, much less to be counted among Hondo's illustrious "best of the best."

TOP GUN: HORNET'S NEST

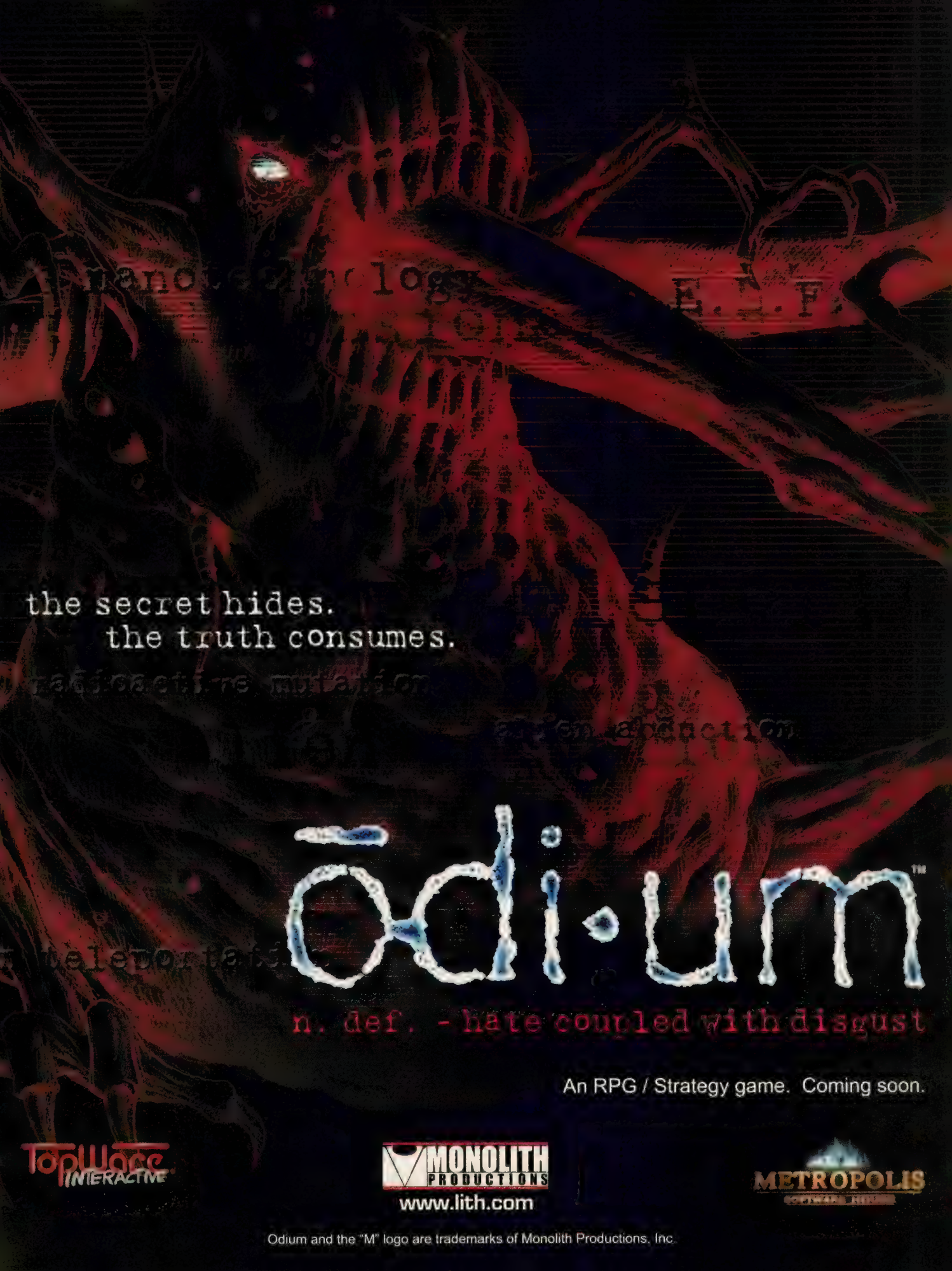
GAMEPLAY:	C
GETTING STARTED:	C+
GRAPHICS:	C+
3D ACCELERATED:	B-
MULTIPLAYER:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	B-

C
OVERALL

Even Hondo can't save this entry-level sim from washing out.

DEVELOPER:	Zipper Interactive
PUBLISHER:	MicroProse 800-879-7529
WEB:	www.microprose.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 32MB RAM, 250MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 64MB RAM, 400MB HD, 3D card, 8x CD-ROM drive, joystick
STREET PRICE:	$25

TIPS ▼ Chaff and flares are virtually worthless countermeasures when the enemy radar locks on to your plane. Instead, your best bet is to fire an air-to-ground missile at the site, then turn tail and run, returning to your flight path once the site has been destroyed. ▼ Search out and destroy any enemy radar installations near the objective area as soon as you can. Enemy missiles will have a much tougher time locking on to your aircraft once these sites have been taken out.



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Microsoft Golf 1999 Edition

Rebate golf

By Daniel Morris

Lean into that shot, buddy!

Microsoft has been churning out elegant, user-friendly golf titles for years now. But while Microsoft Golf remains a venerable franchise, none of its numerous editions has ever really set the genre aflame.

Neither does the 1999 Edition, though given that it's $10 for owners of the 1998 Edition, there is plenty of play value. More on that later.

This is the kind of computer golf Dad likes to play, y'know? It sets up and installs in about 30 seconds, presents a clean, pleasant, uncluttered interface that looks like a Triple A brochure, and you're just about five mouse-clicks—total—from creating a player and hitting the links.

Once you're on the tee, the game itself is incredibly user-friendly. Fly-bys are accompanied by a commentator's tips on how to attack the hole in front of you. It's a welcoming, inviting feel.

On the other hand, it's also way behind the technological curve. Links LS '99, the current bar for golf games, is much more compelling in nearly every regard. Its photo-realistic graphics make Microsoft's look like simplistic palette work. Microsoft Golf's trees and shrubbery look like they were plopped in, with none of the organic feel that exists in Links. When you send an errant shot into the brush in Links, you wince because you can almost see the ball getting tangled in green wraps. In Microsoft Golf 1999, it looks like the ball has been swallowed up by a pixel batch.

All of Microsoft's shots look errant because the ball flight is woeful. The first few shots I took, I thought I'd lost sight of the ball because all I could see was my divot fly sharply into the air and then

The game benefits from an uncluttered, attractive interface.

come down. I realized with astonishment that the divot *was* the ball. The ball-flight physics send your shot in a sort of egg-curved blooper arc that takes off extraordinarily fast, dies like a gunned-down bird, and then bounces a few times before settling. There's none of the artful accuracy of a Links drive.

To be fair, the bizarre ball-flights are the only really noticeable flaw in the mechanics. The four different swing systems, including two- and three-click meters, mouse swing, and a nifty natural swing that provides a fan-shaped meter with which to gauge your stroke are all technically sound and playable. The adjustable difficulty levels are sensitively arranged to challenge you at different levels of comfort with the swing mechanics.

If putting this way bothers you, may I suggest you play as a younger golfer?

The soundtrack includes some nice in-game comments, with favorites like "That was fairly horrendous," and "Well, that certainly was rather embarrassing." But as a rule, Microsoft Golf 1999 is a flat experience for the ears, with nearly inaudible backgrounds. It has none of its competitors' aural flair, sticking instead to club pings and balls rolling inside the cup.

There are two reasons to ignore all my misgivings and maybe buy this game anyway. Number one is that you get free, easy, and enjoyable Internet play on Microsoft's Internet Gaming Zone. Microsoft-bashers never give enough credit to this wonderful service, and it serves golfers splendidly. Reason two is that if you own Microsoft Golf 1998, you can mail in a rebate coupon from the 1999 box and get $30 back from Microsoft, making this a $10 purchase that adds several courses (including a best-of-Donald Ross fantasy course) and the new swing meters to your arsenal.

Rebate golf? Maybe so, but that's the only way I can see recommending this game.

MICROSOFT GOLF 1999 EDITION

GAMEPLAY:	C-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	C+
MULTIPLAYER:	C+
SOUND CHECK:	C

C- OVERALL

Ease of use and friendly Internet play are all that recommend this subpar golf entry.

PUBLISHER:	Microsoft 800-426-9400
WEB:	www.microsoft.com/games/
REQUIRES:	P90, 16MB RAM, 55MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P120, 32MB RAM, 180MB HD
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ The best practice for lowering your score is to play a few rounds of Bingo Bango Bongo. This play mode stresses individual shot-making rather than total score, so you'll get better training in good shots, translating into lower stroke totals later on. ▼ Bring along a lob wedge. Some golfers don't carry one in their bag, but its loft will get you out of jams when you need to get up over a ridge to reach the green on a short pitch. ▼ You can adjust your player's strengths in the Edit Player menu, allocating points to certain aspects of the game. I suggest Short Game and Putting. Any knucklehead can drive a ball down the fairway. It takes help from above to score from in close.

Pro 18 World Tour Golf

Struggling with the shanks

By Daniel Morris

Golf is a lucrative PC gaming market. Just about every publisher under the sun is trying to establish a golf franchise, with varying degrees of disastrous failure. It's only the big boys—Access Software's Links LS, Activision's (formerly Accolade's) Jack Nicklaus, and the EA PGA Tour/Tiger Woods series—that really belong on your short list of candidates.

Games like Pro 18 World Tour Golf are pretenders, and it's my job to relentlessly expose them as such. I play every golf game released for the computer, own every one released in the last three years, and review them all for this magazine. Pro 18 ranks right down there with the likes of Picture Perfect Golf as one of the limpest entries in this very competitive field.

Graphically, there is no comparison between this title and the front-runners of the market. The engine is sophomoric, looking worse than Links did two years ago. The fusion of rendered topography and digitized panoramic views features jagged edges, clipped sprites where trees should be, and foliage that looks more like an artist's clutter than a scenic backdrop. Even the sky is unconvincing, with blobs of white for cloud cover.

The whole game has a sprites-moving-on-postcards look, which is always distracting. The nice selection of real-world pros, among them Tom Lehman, Laura Davies, Jesper Parnevik, and Mark O'Meara, are wasted on this game's crude visuals. The reverse-angle landing cams have long delays, making you wonder whether your ball is ever going to come down.

Women's great Laura Davies tees off.

Davies rattles home a putt.

The game's claim to fame is a four-click swing meter. The extra click is actually just the release of the third click, simulating the wrist snap that can be added to a swing to give the ball an extra shot off the club face. The effect of these four clicks is arguably more accurate in terms of real human dynamics, but it's ultimately no more useful than any of the three-click meters of old. There is no mouse-swing, thankfully bucking the current vogue.

Now you're just four mouse-clicks away from a perfect Tom Lehman swing.

If there's a bright spot to be found within Pro 18, it's that the four-click system presents a well-examined reproduction of a swing. It feels more controlled and has less of that "approximation" feel you typically get from a swing meter. Shaping shots, a feature that may appeal to more serious golfers, lets you craft spin and work lobs, affecting the ball's flight and landing to let you roll balls backward.

While the ball physics and swing mechanics are acceptable, Pro 18 falls flat everywhere else. There are only three courses, located in Idaho, South Africa, and the UK. None are spectacular, and gamers will quickly tire of the limitations of the environments. The TV broadcast presentation of the *World Sports Network* features the BBC's Peter Alliss and some actor playing a commentator named Jim Nelson. (It will be hilarious to see which half-baked reviewers refer to Nelson as a genuine golf commentator, since he's passed off as real.) Their chatter is punctuated by mispronounced names (e.g., Laura "Davis" for Davies). The tournaments begin with aggravating pregame shows that are so generic as to be worthless, and they end with player interviews that are even more grating than their fluffy real-life corollaries.

In short, Links LS 1999 casts a shadow so wide and dark that Pro 18 World Tour can't even find a ray of light. Without the production values to compete, Pro 18 belongs in the clubhouse.

PRO 18 WORLD TOUR GOLF

GAMEPLAY:	D+
GETTING STARTED:	C
GRAPHICS:	C-
MULTIPLAYER:	C
SOUND CHECK:	D

D+ OVERALL

Not enough clubs in its bag to compete with the big boys.

PUBLISHER:	Psygnosis 800-438-7794
WEB:	www.psygnosis.com
REQUIRES:	P166 MMX, 32MB RAM, Sound Blaster 16–compatible sound card, 2x CD-ROM drive, Win 95
RECOMMENDED:	P200 MMX, 64MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS ▼ Take advantage of the detailed "lie" readings, which will alert you to crises like rough grass under your ball. ▼ The bulletins from around the course will update you on how the competition is faring in the tournament. They may also tip you off to upcoming problem holes. ▼ There are some preconfigured swings which can serve as templates as you figure out how to do it.

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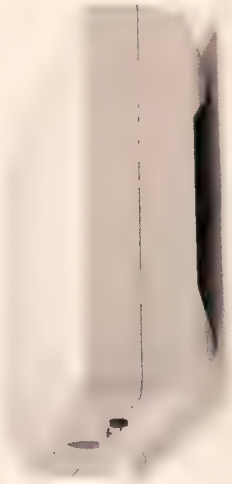

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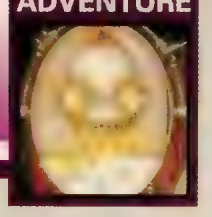

Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus

Because odd can be good

By Jason D'Aprile

The second outing in the Oddworld series, Abe's Exoddus, does everything a great sequel should: It corrects the flaws of the original while keeping intact all the ingredients that made the first so great.

The original Oddworld was a side-scrolling, 2D platform/puzzle game in the style of classics like Out of the World, Flashback, and the recent Heart of Darkness. Since Abe's Exoddus uses basically the same technology to create a similar game, you won't like this one if you didn't like Abe's Oddysee. Fans of the original, however, will be in Odd Heaven.

Abe has returned home to be pronounced the hero of his fellow Mudokons when he receives an ancestral message from beyond the grave. It seems the evil Glukkons are using Mudokon bones and tears (squeezed out through torture) as ingredients in their SoulStorm Brew. Abe and some of his not-so-stalwart buddies investigate and, as usual, find themselves in way over their heads. Abe has to sort things out, rescue his brethren, and stop the Glukkons again.

Exoddus' look, feel, and control are essentially identical to the original's. The characters and landscapes are 3D rendered, beautiful, and distinctively weird, while gameplay is side-scrolling with some minor 3D elements. There's still a slightly low-res feel to the game—you're stuck at 640-by-480—showing off Oddworld's PlayStation roots.

"So, didya hear about the Mudokon who ran under the killer drill...? I love that one!"

Characters in the game, from the somewhat pathetic Abe and his kinfolk to the Sligs, Scrabs, Paramites, and Glukkons, can only be described as bizarrely and sometimes despicably endearing. In Oddworld, everything boils down to survival of the fittest, where each creature is trying to climb farther up the food chain at the expense of others in their way.

Another cheerful locale for Abe to venture through.

What really sets Oddworld apart from other games of this type (scarce though they are) is its communication system. Abe's quest includes rescuing the enslaved Mudokons throughout the land, which requires him to talk to them and issue such orders as follow, wait, and work. New to Oddworld are the emotive responses. Laughing gas, for instance, makes the Mudokons goofy, requiring Abe to literally slap sense into them. Slap too much and they get mad or depressed. Since an angry Mudokon won't help, and a depressed one is on the brink, Abe has to apologize or sympathize with them to repair their feelings. And it's all done with such cute voice-acting that you can't help but laugh.

Abe also has the ability to take control of other creatures. Most of Oddworld's denizens have their own individual languages, which lets Abe manipulate related groups of them at once. The various creatures respond to Abe's interaction in different ways, and that's often the key to surviving the puzzles. The game's challenges move from these communication puzzles to run-and-jump platform gameplay, timing exercises, lots of switch-based tasks, and all manner of combinations in between. Still, while it's often incredibly challenging, Exoddus isn't nearly as frustrating as the original, especially because you can now save at any time.

The main flaw here is that control often feels a little unresponsive, especially when you have to make a combination of moves in quick succession—like running, then rolling, then jumping. But even considering that, Abe's Exoddus pulls you in with a visual sensibility unlike any other, wonderful characters, fantastic cinematic sequences, and great design. It's different, it's fun, it's enthralling, and it's really, really Odd.

ODDWORLD: ABE'S EXODDUS

GAMEPLAY:	A-
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B+
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	A

A- OVERALL

An imaginative and entertaining journey.

DEVELOPER:	Oddworld Inhabitants
PUBLISHER:	GT Interactive 800-610-4847
WEB:	www.oddworld.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM drive
STREET PRICE:	$40

TIPS

▼ The game supplies tidbits of important information the whole way through to give Abe a little direction. ▼ Practice maneuvers like running, going into a roll, and then jumping. If you can't do multi-move maneuvers well, things get rough later on. ▼ Remember that the Mudokons do whatever Abe does when he's leading them, except the blind ones who, if you aren't careful, walk into anything.

DEMONSTRATION #2:

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3. Toss over your shoulder.

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FireTeam

A game with voice

By Peter Olafson

FireTeam is the first PC game I've seen that makes meaningful use of real-time speech. And it adds *immeasurably* to the gaming experience.

At its core, this Internet game—only the three training missions can be played offline—is a squad-based spin on the angled-down shoot-'em-up. Teamed with as many as three other players, you'll battle it out against up to three other squads in crisp, 10-minute games of Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, Gunball (basically rugby with guns), and BaseTag (a campaign to destroy the enemy's bases).

As you'd expect, the deathmatch is all action.

As a Scout (speed), Gunner (firepower), or Commando (a balance of both), you'll use mouse and keyboard to patrol one of about 30 sharply drawn levels while collecting power-ups (med patches to auto-turrets) and using the built-in facilities to restore health and ammo.

And you'll communicate with your fellows—not via macroed taunts or slapping the keyboard with your free hand, but by using the included headset. It works with no apparent speed hit on a 56K modem and only the shortest of delays. What you say is what your teammates hear perhaps a second later.

This is the human heart of the game. You'll find yourself verbally coordinating assaults and defenses, coaxing newcomers into action, corralling the troops, sending back scouting reports, calling for help and trumpeting your victory once it's over. (I treated my captive audience to a peculiarly tuneless rendition of Queen's "We Are the Champions.") The upshot is that you're playing less with the onscreen abstractions and more with real people, and the game becomes what you make it.

FIRETEAM
GeneralChat 1 (0)
Welcome to FireTeam Version 1.0.1.41
Check http://firezone.fireteam.com for the latest FireTeam information.
Score reset occurred at Noon PST on 1/15/99. Only those with over 15 total games or were promoted had their statistics reset.
Please check FireZone if you have questions about the reset.

Always a good crowd in the "B" chat room.

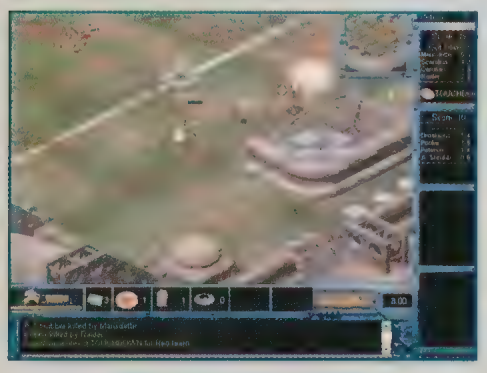
And while I don't mean to go all cosmic on you, once you grow accustomed to talking a good game, FireTeam ultimately moves beyond the physical screen and comes to hang in the air at some vague, intermediate point between you and your teammates. It's not just a battle; it's a conversation. You get a better sense of people around you, and I don't just mean their stats (though there's plenty of that available on FireTeam's Web sites as well).

I had very few problems, and the only thing I miss is a map editor (one's on the way). The game and headset installed and set up flawlessly, and games for newbies and more experienced players always seemed to be available in the "B" chat room. And, playing over a high-speed T1 connection—admittedly, a far-from-typical link—the game was a real joy. (A colleague reports it also worked well over his 56K modem.) The voices were clear enough that I began to recognize them, and the only comprehension problems occurred when several players cut across one another (or put the microphone too close to their mouths). The action was punchy, lag-free, and challenging. It was over not a moment too soon or a moment too late.

Then, after several successful sessions, the online lobby went down while I was waiting for a game to start. It came back within a couple of hours, and I got in a few good battles, but users subsequently reported problems starting and leaving games.

It's worth noting that they all did it politely, though. In fact, I've rarely dealt with a nicer, more helpful bunch of people online (save the one who kicked me out of his squad without explanation). Maybe FireTeam just attracts a more sophisticated crowd.

Or maybe the social requirements of speech induce a little more online civility than I've grown accustomed to seeing...and now, to hearing.



Going for the goal in GunBall.

FIRETEAM

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A-

B+ OVERALL

There are voices in my head, and I like what I'm hearing.

PUBLISHER:	Multitude 888-689-8326
WEB:	www.fireteam.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 32MB RAM, full-duplex Win 95–compatible sound card, 28.8 modem, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	56K modem
STREET PRICE:	$60

TIPS ▼ Pick a captain for the BaseTag levels and let him make assignments. If everyone's a freelancer, it'll be much harder to win. ▼ Watch out for CTF squatters—some folks hide in a room's corner and lure you in by changing the color of some, but not all, of the room's flags. Then they zap you when your back is turned. ▼ By all means, set up multiplayer ambushes—but don't move as a pack. A few well-placed explosions can take everyone down.

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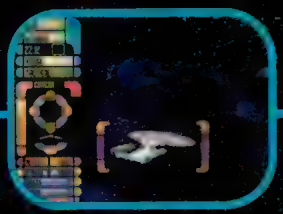
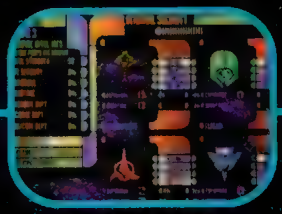


Engage in 3-D tactical combat



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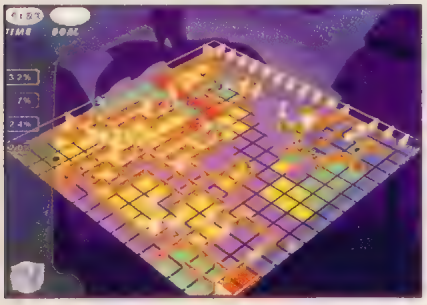
Pinky and the Brain: World Conquest

Zort!

Laboratory mice whose genes have been spliced...and their goal is to take over the world." The title song pretty much sums up the plot of Warner Brothers' successful afternoon cartoon *Pinky and the Brain*. Brain's your typical megalomaniacal mad-scientist type with a grotesquely big noggin. Pinky, his lackey in crime, is a rat with a British accent who's not quite right in the head. Now SouthPeak brings the gruesome twosome to your PC with World Conquest.



Oh, you dirty rat. Those were my tiles!

Adventure game? Uh...no. These rodents believe solving lab mazes will sharpen their world domination skills (go figure). Whether you scurry around as Pinky or Brain, your objective is to fill the floor tiles with your color by running over them. The 30-mission Take Over the World campaign is easy at first, but as you progress, you'll encounter obstacles like walls, slippery oil, sticky glue, and other rats who are also filling floor tiles. You'll get help from power-ups like Tile Bomb Packs, whose explosions color several tiles at once. Finish the maze in first place and you're rewarded with a clip from the cartoon show (funny, but irrelevant to the game). Then it's off to the next puzzle.

Adjustable difficulty levels, 3D graphics, an easy-to-use maze builder, multiplay, and the original voices from the show (thank goodness!) combine to make this a fun run. There's also tournament mode against three CPU rats or laugh-a-minute multiplay against three of your friends over the Net or a LAN.

Story line? Non-existent. Kids' game? Absolutely. Fun for adults? You bet! But be warned: you'll have a tough time getting that song out of your head.

—Danny W. Lam

PINKY AND THE BRAIN

GAMEPLAY:	B+
GETTING STARTED:	B+
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	B+
SOUND CHECK:	A

B+ OVERALL

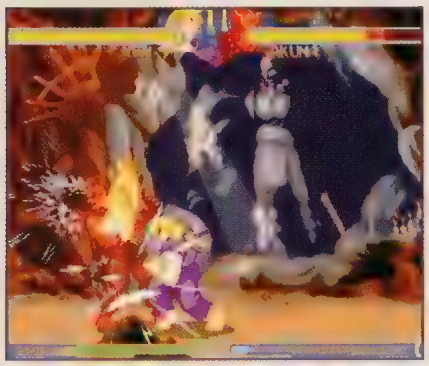
P&B fans: this one's a riot. Non-P&B fans: this one's a riot.

DEVELOPER:	Gigawatt Studios
PUBLISHER:	SouthPeak Interactive 800-774-6183
WEB:	www.southpeak.com
REQUIRES:	P166, 32MB RAM, 65MB HD, 4x CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166, 3D card
STREET PRICE:	$30

Street Fighter Alpha 2

Whoa, that's a big fireball!

Capcom's been around for a while on the arcade and console sides, and now it's again testing the PC gaming waters by porting over a couple of hits from the arcade/console stations. For the first time, Street Fighter Alpha 2's Ryu and Bison grace the PC monitor. It's billed as a "flawless translation" of the arcade version, and for the most part, this claim holds up.



Take that, and that, and...

The gang's all here: Ken, Bison, Chun-Li, Zangief, Akuma—18 characters in all. Tiger Uppercuts, Yoga Flames, and Chun-Li's beautiful Lightning Kick are included, and special moves like the Zero Counter (where you block an opponent's attack and counterattack) and the ability to avoid being "floored" make this game more than just kick and punch. It was also great to experience Ryu's cry of "*Hadoken!*" as he shot off a fireball, and the "You're better than you look" dialogue boxes on my PC.

A great feature is the Custom Combos. You build the energy on your Super Combo level gauge by attacking your opponent. Once you have enough, you can activate it, making your character move faster than the Energizer Bunny. Depending on how much energy you've built up (up to level 3), you can be performing devastating super combos for what may seem like an eternity to your opponent. Unfortunately, multiplay is limited to two on one PC.

You shouldn't expect mind-blowing graphics, and game speed slows down a lot during some fights. While slowdowns didn't occur as often on a PII 400, they kept this version from being as much ass-kicking fun as the arcade or console versions. But if you've got a fast machine and it's been a long day, feel free to smack M. Bison around. *—Danny W. Lam*

STREET FIGHTER

GAMEPLAY:	B
GETTING STARTED:	A
GRAPHICS:	C
MULTIPLAYER:	C
SOUND CHECK:	B

B OVERALL

Street Fighter for your desktop.

PUBLISHER:	Capcom
WEB:	www.capcom.com
REQUIRES:	P133, 24MB RAM, 8MB HD, 4x-CD-ROM drive
RECOMMENDED:	P166
STREET PRICE:	$30

Carnivores

Be vewwy quiet. We'we hunting velociwaptors.

Elmer Fudd would get chewed up but good in Carnivores, a new WizardWorks title that's half hunting game, half action game. As an action game...well, don't ditch Half-Life yet.

As a hunting game, though, Carnivores is a mildly pleasant surprise; I actually preferred it to either Deer Hunter. Environment textures are quite decent in software, and there's 3Dfx support. Also, the dinosaur motion design and AI are passable.

The hunt is more lively than some of those real Earth hunting games.

You'll be able to take docile, vegetarian dinos such as the triceratops and pachycephalosaurus pretty easily, and they're plentiful, which is rare for prey in classic hunting games. However, bad-ass dinos like the allosaurus and velociraptor will be on you fast. If you don't get them with your first shot, you probably won't get a second. The tyrannousaurus rex, which you only see at expert level, is even tougher—it takes an eye shot to level the king of the dinosaurs.

Carnivores staggers its difficulty level according to the points you earn by bagging different dino species. You can boost your abilities with such things as cover scent or radar, but only at a percentage drop in your points. (You can boost that percentage to over 100 by choosing tranquilizing over killing.)

Carnivores does show its budget status in some ways: weapon choices are minimal, there are only six levels (three open to novices, the others to advanced or expert), and the environments can get pretty similar after a while. But the action elements take it a notch above most hunting titles, and one can imagine that triceratops is tastier than venison, especially at the price. *—Don St. John*

CARNIVORES

GAMEPLAY:	B-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	B
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	B

B- OVERALL

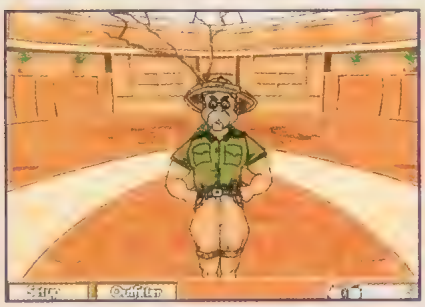
The action makes it more fun than any budget-level hunting title out there.

DEVELOPER:	ActionForms
PUBLISHER:	WizardWorks 800-229-2744
WEB:	www.wizworks.com
REQUIRES:	P150, 16MB RAM, 85MB HD, 8x CD-ROM drive, Win 95/98
RECOMMENDED:	P200, 32MB RAM, 3Dfx card
STREET PRICE:	$20

The Browning African Safari *Malaria isn't the worst*

Hey, we like a good challenge. Oquirrh Productions, the publisher of The Browning African Safari, dropped us a note mentioning that we'd left its game out of our recent roundup of hunting titles ("Hunting Big Game," November 1998) and enclosed a copy. They also said it was the best hunting game on the market. Fair enough, we thought—we'll give it a whirl.

Well, be glad we did because now you'll never have to. The Browning African Safari—the fourth in a line of Browning games—is an astonishingly amateurish pass at a hunting game, replete with cheesy animations superimposed onto photo-realistic environments. The action is purely throwback sit-and-spin. This game would've looked outdated in 1993, never mind now.



This is the guy you're working for? Sheesh.

There are actually a couple of decent ideas attempted here. You hunt over a seven-day window, staked to $10,000 by some nutcase named Snidley who wants trophies for his museum. Bag enough, and he'll continue to stake you; fail, and your game ends. Your funding also depends on your supplies, the trophy cost of your prize, and its rarity (once Snidley has a particular trophy, he pays a lot less for repeats). Even more interestingly, this is one of the rare titles where you're in some danger. Cross a rhino or crocodile, for instance, and you could be toast. You also have to worry about malaria—this is Africa, after all.

Unfortunately, the action and overall look are so embarrassing that they totally eclipse the concepts. You'd have a hard time not laughing when your cartoon guide pops up to warn you to take a drink, or when an animated zebra rambles through the photo backdrop. Perhaps it's bad form to pick on a small company that doesn't have the development dollars of the majors, but it's even worse form for it to try and pick on your wallet with a game as bad as this. *—Don St. John*

AFRICAN SAFARI

GAMEPLAY:	D-
GETTING STARTED:	B
GRAPHICS:	F
MULTIPLAYER:	N/A
SOUND CHECK:	B-

D- OVERALL

Awful—and $5 more than most other hunting titles, too!

DEVELOPER:	Cunning Developments
PUBLISHER:	Oquirrh Productions 801-466-9222
WEB:	www.oquirrh.com
REQUIRES:	P75, 16MB RAM, 2MB HD, 2x CD-ROM drive, Win95/98
STREET PRICE:	$25

End Game

By Peter Olafson

Your indispensable guide to notable add-ons, compilations, updated versions, and other bargains.

Prince of Persia 2

With the release of the third game in the series drawing near, Red Orb has reissued the first two Prince of Persia jump-'n'-runs and the Making of Prince of Persia 3D QuickTime movie as the Prince of Persia Collection.

They're as delightful as they were back in the early '90s.

The original Jordan Mechner game set the stage for 3D descendants like Tomb Raider and Redguard. Supple animation, a classic structure, a gameworld that felt boundless, and an almost symbiotic relationship with the player character made Prince unlike any game of its era. The sequel, more colorful and feature-filled, is slightly less arresting, as the occasional puzzle breaks up the action.

And the PoP3D movie, while standard "The Making of..." stuff, has some charming moments, like the live-action shots of Mechner's brother modeling the moves for the first game. (Unhappily, it tended to stall and stutter on my 24x drive.) (Red Orb; www.redorb.com; $20) **B+**

Maybe I'm just starved for new Battlezone levels, but Battle Grounds strikes me as a pretty respectable data disc. Like Macmillan's earlier Dark Reign expansion, this one has a solid frontend with mission descriptions. And unlike Battles on the Outer Rim, its 97 levels are divided into a nice variety of single- and multiplayer challenges. Kudos, too, for supporting a game that, while groundbreaking, didn't sell nearly as well as it deserved. (Macmillan Digital Publishing; www.mcp.com; $20) **B**

With SWAT Force, Sierra finally leaves behind its first- and second-generation Police Quest adventure games in favor of strategy-oriented Special Weapons and Tactics. While neither of these games stands with Sierra classics, the original SWAT holds up well for an FMV game—perhaps a reflection of all those cinema verité shows on network TV. And SWAT 2, while distinctly unthrilling and almost *Dragnet* corny from the terrorist side of the fence, at least has the advantage of an appealing real-world hook—something few real-time strategy games can claim. (SierraFX; www.sierra.com; $45) **C+**

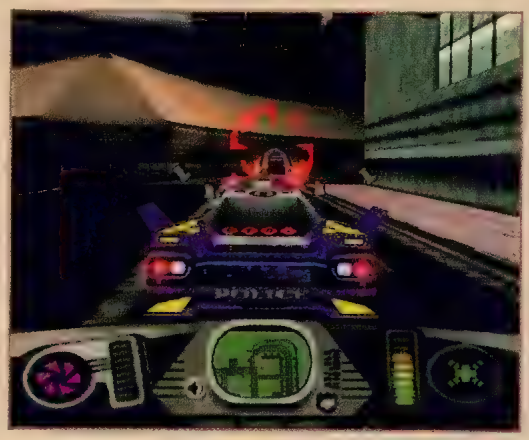
Worldwide Warfare is effectively a Westwood answer to Cavedog's Total Annihilation Commander Pack. A compilation of compilations that includes the Windows 95 version of Command & Conquer, the Covert Ops add-on, Red Alert, and the Counterstrike and Aftermath data disc, it's the last word in pre–Tiberian Sun C&C collections.

However, while TA still has some bite, this collection is more instructive as history: The Birth of a Genre. (Westwood; www.westwood. com; $50) **B-**

Devoted followers of Heroes of Might and Magic II—an update of New World Computing's venerable strategy/adventure King's Bounty—may want HOMMII Gold for the 25 new maps and some apparent tweaks. However, that's a pretty thin excuse for this re-pairing of HOMMII and the Price of Loyalty add-on, given last year's comprehensive HOMM Compendium. There's no printed manual, either. (New World Computing; www.3do.com; $20) **C+**

Here's a novel approach to compilations: Throw in a bad game no one's ever seen. Along with a quartet of good-to-greats—Interstate '76 Gold, Carmageddon, Redneck Rampage, and MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries—Interplay has included Crime Killer in its Action Hall of Fame.

They should've just thrown it out. It's a joyless car-based shoot-'em-up. You tool a police car around an anonymous city, using guns or a "pacifier" weapon on the hapless population for offenses as minor as illegal parking—and each stage seems more or less like the one that preceded it. After three, I never wanted to look at it again. (Interplay; www.interplay.com; $30) **B**



Crime Killer

The Ultimate Might and Magic Archives is ideal for people who can no longer find the limited-edition version of M&M VI. Like that 3DO compilation, Interplay's M&M set includes the first five core games, the obscure Swords of Xeen, and, when both M&Ms IV and V are installed, a unique cross-thatching called World of Xeen.

This RPG line has far too much monster mashing for my taste (and that goes for M&M VI as well), but, at the very least, M&M and M&M III belong in any archivist's collection, and World of Xeen alone will keep you well-occupied into the next millennium. It's docked a notch for the lack of the Archives line's trademark full printed manual. (Interplay; www.interplay.com; $30) **B-**

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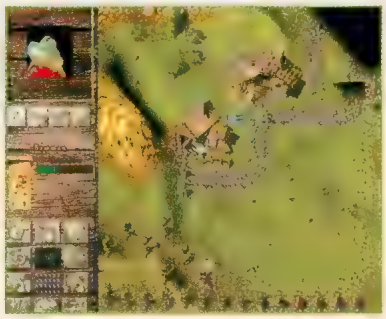
CHEATS & STRATEGIES

By Danny W. Lam

We're back in all our cheatin' glory after our Half-Life–induced hiatus. But this break means that we've had more time to bring you all the best cheats from the latest games. Enjoy!

Knights & Merchants

Open the inventory window by clicking on a storage house, and click once on the following items. A red triangle will appear in the item's square as each is selected.



Row 1, item 3 (Wooden Boards)
Row 2, item 2 (Iron Bars)
Row 2, item 4 (Wine Casks)
Row 3, item 1 (Bread)
Row 3, item 5 (Cooked Meat)
Row 4, item 1 (Animal Hide)
Row 4, item 5 (Plate Mail)
Row 5, item 1 (Hand Axes)
Row 5, item 2 (Swords)
Row 5, item 3 (Lances)
Row 5, item 4 (Pikes)
Row 5, item 5 (Longbows)

Then, click on Row 6, item 1 (Crossbows) to add 10 of each item to your storage house, or on Row 6, item 2 (Horses) to complete the current mission.

Oddworld: Abe's Exoddus

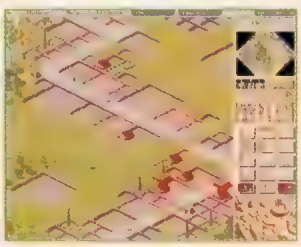
To skip to the next level: From the main menu, hold Shift, then press down, right, left, right, left, right, left, up.

To skip to the next path: During the game, hold Shift, then press left, right, up, down, left, right.

To see the next movie: From the main menu, hold Shift, then press up, left, right, left, right, left, right, down.

Caesar III

Start the game and place a well on the map. Right-click on the well, then press and hold the Alt key and K. This enables the cheat codes.



Alt-C: Gives you more cash.

Alt-V: Promotes you and allows you to play the next map.

H.E.D.Z.

During the game, press the T key for the message prompt, and then type:

OH MY GOD: God mode.

TOO HARD FOR ME: AI off.

Myth II: Soulblighter

At the main screen, press and hold the Shift key and select New Game. This allows access to all the missions.

Powerslide

During the game, simply type the code. An icon will appear in the top right of the screen, indicating a correctly entered cheat.

BLAST: Repels other cars.

BOMB: Launches a bomb from your car onto the track.

BURN: Launches a fiery rocket from your car.

GLIDER: When in the air, car controls like a glider.

HOVER: Cars hover.

ICBM: Car acts like a missile.

JUMP: Car jumps several feet in the air each time code is entered.

LIGHT: Lighter car.

LUNAR: Lunar gravity.

SLEEP: AI cars don't steer, they just accelerate.

SLIPPY: Slippery surfaces.

SPIDER: Car adheres to any surface.

STICKY: Sticky surfaces.

SUCK: Cars gravitate toward each other.

TIMEWARP: Slows time for AI opponents.

TWISTER: AI cars get whipped around by an invisible tornado.

WARP: Opponents' cars go very slow.

Populous: The Beginning

Press and hold the Tab and F11 keys together to bring up the text-entry mode, then type **byrne** *to activate the cheat mode.*

During the game, press and hold:

Tab and F3: Gives all spells.

Tab and F4: Gives all buildings.

Tab and F5: Gives full Mana.

SiN

Press the tilde (~) key, then enter the code:

/superfuzz: God mode.

/wuss: Gives all weapons.

/health 999: Gives 999 health.

/nocollision: No clip mode.

/wallflower: No target.

/spawn magnum: Gives the Magnum.

/spawn shotgun: Gives the Shotgun.

/spawn assaultrifle: Gives the Assault Rifle.

/spawn rocketlauncher: Gives the Rocket Launcher.

/spawn sniperrifle: Gives the Sniper Rifle.

/spawn heligun: Gives the Big Gun from the chopper.

/spawn reactiveshields: Gives the Reactive Shield.

/spawn rockets: Gives Rockets.

/spawn coin: Gives a coin.

/spawn health: Gives a Health Pack.

/spawn cookies: Gives a pack of cookies.

/spawn lensflare: Creates a light effect.

MegaMan X3

Enter these at the code-selection screen, then press Start to get past the bosses:

7543-2857-8141-2141: Blast Hornet

2563-4865-6851: Frozen Buffalo

8573-2257-6241-1141: Toxic Seahorse

2563-4265-6357-5127: Tunnel Rhino

2373-4267-4357-7727: Volt Catfish

4478-4863-4627-7358: Crush Crawfish

S.C.A.R.S.

In the Options menu, go to Settings, then enter these passwords:

GLASSX: Crystal cup.

ROCKYY: Diamond cup.

ZDPEAK: Zenith cup.

XPERTS: MASTER mode so you can compete with all hidden cars.

DESERT: Scorpion car.

RATTLE: Cobra car.

RUNNER: Cheetah car.

MYSTER: Panther car.

ALLVID: All codes.

Railroad Tycoon II

Press Tab to get the small cursor, and type any of the following:

Bigfoot: Win instantly.

BoBo: Lose scenario.

King of the hill: Gives your character $100 million.

Cattle futures: Gives your character $1 million.

Powerball: Gives company $100 million.

Slush fund: Gives company $1 million.

Let me in: Gives access to all denied territories.

Speed Racer: Doubles maximum train speeds.

AMD103: Converts all engines to AMD-103s at expense of profits.

Casey Jones: All other companies' trains crash.

Show me the trains: Allows any engine to be purchased.

Overtime: Doubles industry production.

Viagra: Increases city sizes.

Amtrak: Company loses $1 million.

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Eidos (Action)
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Release: 4/99
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'DESCENT 3' New lethal weapons will be at your side as you obliterate the robot-infestation in the mines & on the surface! Every creature has personality & its AI is tailored to its environment. In-depth, diverse levels with multiple objectives for each mission. Real-time lighting, new weapons, & new ships. LAN, modem, or TCP/IP play with up to 8 players.

Interplay (Action)
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GT Interactive (Action)
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Crystal Dynamics
(Roleplaying)
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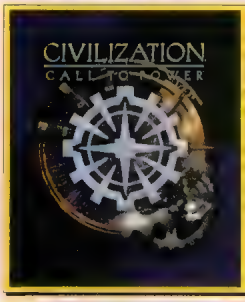

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3Dfx's Voodoo3 is a different animal

Screamin' Like a Banshee

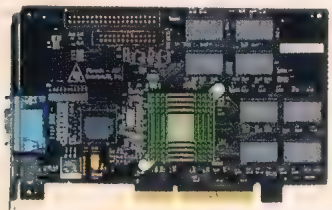
By George T. Chronis

Thanks to the realities of the video-card business and magazine deadlines, there should be Voodoo3 cards in stores not long after you read this. If you think it's a little soon to be contemplating a replacement for your powerhouse Voodoo2—which probably hasn't had enough time to gather dust—you'd be right.

But Voodoo3 is not an enhancement of the Voodoo2 chipset. In fact, it has little in common with earlier Voodoo accelerators.

Voodoo as we knew it was an add-on 3D accelerator that worked in concert with a 2D card already in your PC. Although the Voodoo2 nearly doubled 3D performance over the original, the two products were based on the same chipset architecture. Not so the Voodoo3, which, upon examination, uses a chipset architecture based on the 2D/3D Banshee.

In mid-1998, when the world got its first look at Banshee, 3Dfx had a complete road map for technologically enhancing the chipset. The paramount change was to shrink the .35 micron core of the chipset to a .25 micron size—cutting heat, boosting speed, and lowering the cost per unit. Look closely at Voodoo3 specs and compare them to how 3Dfx was characterizing Banshee 2, and it becomes obvious that Voodoo3 *is* Banshee 2.



From humble Banshees do Voodoo3 cards grow.

At COMDEX last November, 3Dfx representatives were privately explaining that the decision to can the Banshee name and replace it with Voodoo3 was made because the increased speed of the enhanced chipset warranted 3Dfx's premier nameplate.

The Voodoo3 will be available only from 3Dfx and will be produced by the company's STB division.

But as we know now, 3Dfx has acquired STB with the intention of marketing video cards under its own label (see Game Wire, March issue). When 3Dfx announced the STB acquisition last December, company representatives also made clear that the only place gamers could buy Voodoo3s was from 3Dfx—cutting off big card-maker customers such as Diamond and Creative who had been instrumental in building the Voodoo business. From a marketing perspective, if you're going to take your business into competition with the likes of Diamond and Creative, it makes a lot of sense to use the most recognizable brand affiliation at your disposal. For 3Dfx, that meant its new product had to go out the door under the name of Voodoo.

What are the specs?

Gamers who choose to dismiss Voodoo3 because of its divergent lineage should take another look. As nVIDIA proved with its RIVA TNT boards, combining outstanding 3D performance with high resolutions and high refresh rates is a winning combination—perhaps successful enough for 3Dfx to cast off the add-on 3D chipset business entirely. The main issue for gamers is whether it's worth the cost to chuck existing video cards to buy new equipment.

In layman's terms, 3Dfx's director of advanced graphics Tony Tamasi says the Voodoo3 will perform a mite better than two Voodoo2 boards running side by side in SLI mode. Not bad for a single-card solution. To get that performance, 3Dfx has added a second texture-memory unit (TMU) to seriously punch up fill rates—similar to the process applied to the original Voodoo in creating the Voodoo2—and switched to the .25 core.

As design philosophies go, 3Dfx is totally wrapped up with the concept of speed, registered in the form of frames per second. In a perfect world, 3Dfx wants all games to run at at least 60 fps.

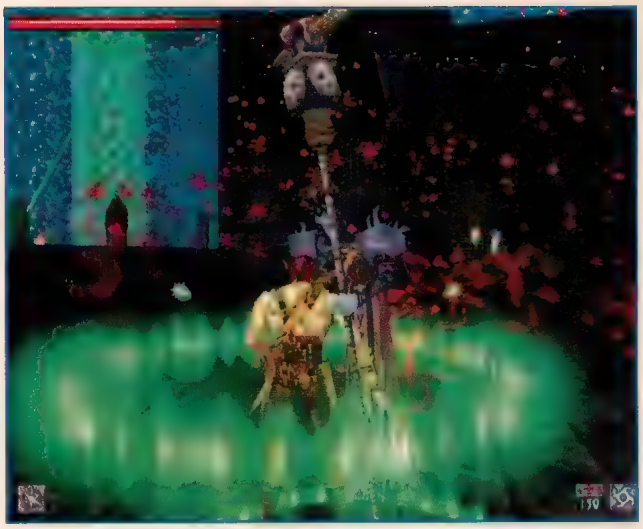
To that end, 3Dfx has made certain compromises. While nVIDIA embraced a 32-bit color ceiling for TNT, 3Dfx remains anchored

at 16-bit. The rationale is that 32-bit rendering eats up twice the frame-buffer memory bandwidth as 16-bit rendering does—which, according to 3Dfx, means you cut in half the speed at which the video card moves textures, as well as chops frame rates in half.

Another design compromise is using only half the potential of AGP ports. AGP slots not only provide faster access to the CPU—66MHz bus speeds and above as opposed to 33MHz for PCI—but they also make it possible to render additional textures with the system RAM in your PC. Because 3Dfx is intent on speed, rendering textures in system RAM is too slow, so Voodoo3 doesn't use that option. The only way for Voodoo3 to reach its fill-rate goal of moving 366 megatexels per second (texels are the individual elements of a texture) is to use fast local RAM on the card itself. In comparison, a Voodoo2 pumps 180 Mtexels per second, twin Voodoo2s in SLI mode register 360 Mtexels per second, the original Banshee turns in 100 Mtexels per second, and the original Voodoo but 45 Mtexels per second, Tamasi says.

The decision to top out Voodoo3 at 16MB RAM was also made because of speed considerations. Setting a target of fast gameplay in 1,024-by-768 resolution at a monitor refresh rate of 60Hz, 3Dfx figures 16MB of on-board is optimum, although other manufacturers are talking about moving to 32MB RAM. With 16-bit rendering, a standard Voodoo3 will assign roughly 5MB RAM to frame-buffer duties and the remaining 11MB for fast-access storage of textures.

In spurning 32-bit rendering and fixating on 1,024-by-768, 3Dfx doesn't need to add more than 16MB of memory to maintain its 60 fps goals. When 3Dfx unveiled the prototype Voodoo3 at COMDEX, it demonstrated Quake II running at a resolution of 1,600-by- 1,200 at 30 fps. Pretty darn fast under the circumstances, but that was for show. 3Dfx doesn't expect most gamers to play at that resolution during the lifetime of the Voodoo3.



Games like Heretic II that are already Banshee-friendly will have no problem with Voodoo3.

"There are virtually no games that take advantage of 32-bit rendering," says Tamasi. "Everything for the foreseeable future is 16-bit, and I doubt that will change through 1999."

But Tamasi says Voodoo3 drivers have already been overhauled to support Intel's new Pentium III (previously code-named Katmai) CPU that adds 70 new instructions to boost MMX performance. Pentium III systems should start hitting stores before summer.

And what of 2D?

Like the Banshee, the Voodoo3 comes to the party sporting a 128-bit 2D graphics engine. Again, speed is the goal, but at least where SVGA is concerned, 3Dfx does care about higher resolutions. By using a 350MHz RAMDAC, Voodoo3 boards will support resolutions up to 2,048-by-1,563 at a monitor refresh rate of 75Hz, according to 3Dfx.

Voodoo3 drivers are already Pentium III–ready.

Another issue 3Dfx talks up is better video-signal filtering in Voodoo3 (compared to Voodoo2)—a feature already addressed in Banshee cards with a new filtering algorithm. Tamasi says the same algorithm is being used with Voodoo3. Better image quality is the goal, and 3Dfx believes that gamers will see a positive difference in how well images appear on the desktop and in games. One of the minor drawbacks of add-on Voodoo cards is that in most instances, the video signal gets processed twice—once by the 2D card and once again when it passes through the 3D accelerator.

In standard Voodoo pass-through hookups, the impact on visual quality really wasn't noticeable except at higher resolutions on 21-inch monitors. But seeing a trend toward higher resolutions and bigger monitors, 3Dfx believes that better filtering is a selling point.

Bottom Line

Is a Voodoo3 in your future? If beauty is what you crave, and you're set on running Unreal all the time in 32-bit, probably not. If you're already running two Voodoo2s, you won't see much of a gain in performance, so there's no reason to start salivating over Voodoo3 at this point, either. Although Tamasi says retail Voodoo3s should be under $200, considering the market's glut of Voodoo2s and the likelihood that existing Voodoo2 card makers would rather dump 3Dfx products after being denied Voodoo3, Voodoo2 boards should hover around $100 in the coming months, so it probably makes sense to pick up a second if you only own one at the moment.

But if an extremely fast 2D/3D combo card is what you need for your system, and you don't already own a TNT or Voodoo2 product, then watch those first Voodoo3 reviews carefully.

Microsoft DSS 80

RATING: A-

Maybe the Universal Serial Bus, better known as USB, is good for something. In Microsoft's new Digital Sound System 80, I've finally found a peripheral that makes me take notice of those two USB ports in the back of my computer.

Open up the big box, and you'll find the sub-woofer unit is as big as a stone from the pyramids and weighs about as much. Installation is simple, but you have two options to take note of. If you connect via the USB port, the audio signal to the DSS 80 is all digital and operates without a sound card (as long as you're working in Windows 98). But since some games may not fully support this digital connection, you can also plug a different cable into your existing sound card, and then switch between USB or your sound card with the handy Control Panels applet. The DSS 80 comes with a standard audio wire in case you need it.

I started off pretending I didn't have USB or Windows 98 on my PC to test audio ranges. What I discovered were outstanding lows, mainly the bass—great for gamers in love with explosions and other forms of rumble. But when I tested the highs, the speakers seemed to rattle out in attempts to duplicate the tip-top notes of Sebastian Bach, The Gypsy Kings, or even Mariah Carey. I know, I know, but Half-Life and Rainbow Six are not the best test vehicles for high notes, perhaps another indicator that most gamers could care less about those lofty ranges.

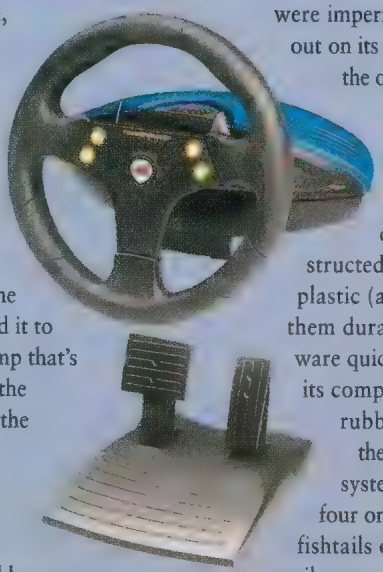
USB definitely provided a cleaner, warmer sound than standard audio cables. The difference was phenomenal. Using the included 10-band equalizer, which only works in USB, I quickly adjusted high and low ranges to even better suit my personal tastes. Bottom line, the DSS 80 in USB mode provides awesome warmth in the midrange and great low bass. Again, the highs aren't as good as what we heard from the Monsoon system reviewed last month, but the DSS 80's lows, midranges, and bass—not to mention the best sub-woofer shells money can buy—make this a great gaming speaker system. (Microsoft; 800-426-9400; www.microsoft.com/hardware/; street $249)

—Nash Werner

NASCAR Super Sport

RATING: B-

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. And, unfortunately, the weakest link in the otherwise-strong chain formed by ThrustMaster's NASCAR Super Sport wheel-and-pedals combo is the one that connected it to my desk—the clamp that's supposed to hold the wheel in place on the play surface.



The spindle snapped while I was tightening it. (Steel really would have been better than plastic, folks.) In addition, the rubber domes that brace the clamp against the bottom of my desk were imperfectly glued in place. One fell out on its own, and I barely had to nudge the other with my thumb to dislodge it. Not the quality control we've come to expect from ThrustMaster.

Otherwise, the daisy-chained desk and floor units are well constructed from steel, rubber, and hard plastic (a heavy 24 pounds)—making them durable and functional. The software quickly identified the cockpit once its components were plugged in. The rubber surface on the wheel has the pleasant feel of stand-up arcade-system wheels. The six buttons—four on the steering column and two fishtails on the wheel's inner rim—are easily accessible.

And the Super Sport worked well on a range of racing games like Need for Speed III and Grand Prix Legends. In fact, I drove more competently than I ever did via keyboard. In contrast, Viper's steering seemed on the sensitive side.

And while the unit and its software come together fairly intuitively, the printed docs—a quick-start sheet, a brief troubleshooting guide, and an advisory on an included NASCAR 2 patch—seem to assume that the user is already familiar with steering-wheel conventions and don't mention some fundamental installation instructions. But the online docs, with detailed setup instructions for 20 older racing games, are extremely helpful.

Giving ThrustMaster the benefit of doubt, maybe I was too hard on the mounting clamps. Overall, the Super Sport is a good, solid unit. Shame about that link, though. (ThrustMaster; www.thrustmaster.com; street $80).

—Peter Olafson

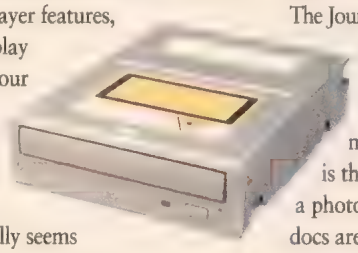
Hi-Val Third Generation DVD-ROM Kit

RATING: B+

You've resisted temptation, but it's finally time to retire that trusty 12x CD-ROM drive for a faster unit. But do you buy one of the new 40x drives, or do you take the plunge into DVD? Now that drive makers have gone through two generations of DVD products, most of the bugs have been worked out, and units such as Hi-Val's Third Generation DVD-ROM kit look pretty good.

First- and second-generation DVD drives had problems reading CD-R and CD-RW discs, and their CD-ROM playback speeds were pretty slow (in the 6x and 8x ranges). Not so with Hi-Val's third-generation kit. Based on a Toshiba mechanism, this drive will play back at 32x—not too shabby. The DVD drive reader will accept up to 4.8GB discs, which will remain standard for now. (Theoretically, it's possible to use compression and both sides of a DVD disc to get as high as 17GB of storage.) Also included is a Hi-Val Real Magic MPEG-2 decoder card and all the wires and cables you'll need for installation.

The hardest part about shelling out the extra dough for DVD is that there haven't been many PC gaming or computer-based applications to make it worth your while and your cash. Many drive makers have seen fit to mirror home DVD-player features, expecting you to play DVD movies on your PC. That's where the MPEG-2 card comes in to help you decode the movies. But it finally seems like game publishers are planning to release multidisc games such as Settlers III and Starfleet Academy on single DVD-ROMs, making kits like this one a better buy. And since you're working at 32x with standard CD-ROMs, you're really not missing out in the speed wars.



Installation was incredibly easy. This was the first time I've installed a peripheral without having to open the case again to adjust something. The MPEG card takes up a PCI slot, so make sure you have one available. Win 98 detected the drive and MPEG card immediately and asked for the drivers (included on a floppy). After rebooting, I was up and running. I tried out the DVD game titles included in the package. The Journeyman Project 3: Legacy of Time looked very sharp. And no more swapping out CDs in Riven.

This kit does have flaws though. My main criticism, besides its lack of software, is the poor documentation. The manual is a photocopied mess, though the MPEG card's docs are grade A. And it would've been nice if they'd included a cable long enough to plug into the TV (the kit's is too short) so I wouldn't have had to stop by Radio Shack before watching the included copy of *Starship Troopers*. (Yeah, I much prefer to watch movies on my 25-inch TV.) (Hi-Val; www.hival.com; street $279) —*Danny W. Lam*

HARDWARE HALL OF FAME

Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy: just check *PC Games*' running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.

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Monitor	ViewSonic G790 19-inch	ViewSonic; 800-888-8583; approx. $845	A
CD-ROM drive	Sony CDU-711 32x	Sony Corp.; 800-476-6972; approx. $99	A-
Sound card	Montego A3DXstream	Turtle Beach; 800-233-9377; approx. $99	A
Speakers	PCWorks FourPointSurround	Cambridge SoundWorks 800-367-4434; $99	A
Joystick	F-16 Combatstick	CH Products; 760-598-2518; $70	A+
Gamepad	SideWinder Gamepad	Microsoft; 800-426-9400; $39	A+
Modem	SupraExpress 56	Diamond; 800-727-8772; approx. $99	A
Best 2D	Raven	Quantum 3D 888-236-2446; approx. $149	A-
2D/3D video card	Spectra 2500	Canopus; 888-868-2533; approx. $180	A-
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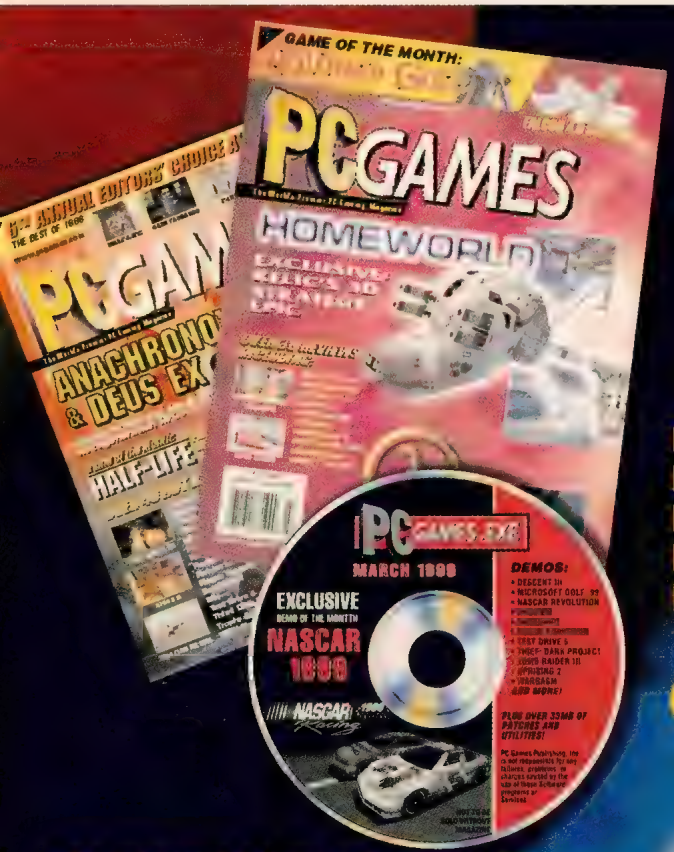

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With a bedside manner befitting Doctors Kervorkian, Doom, and Schlessinger, here's an overdose of the prescriptions of Dr. Funny.

ASH

ASH BACKWARD

Ash in your face

Gather 'round, gaming freaks—we've got a new humor page for you. Okay, I can tell by the wave of skepticism washing over your faces that you're thinking, "Uh, I wish I were naked and drunk." No wait, that was our editor—the telepathy lines must have crossed there somewhere. You were thinking, "Game geeks being funny is like seeing Ally McBeal bum-rushing a buffet line. It just ain't gonna happen."

Well, you're wrong. (On both counts. I've heard Ms. Flockhart can binge and purge like an Ancient Roman.) Though they're as rare as an Oakland Raider with a Super Bowl ring, there are funny gamers out there, and I happen to be one of 'em. In fact, Dr. Funny's my middle name. Well, actually, it was more of a nickname growing up, along with Spineless Cretin, Pathetic Simpleton, and Stephen. (The bullies in my neighborhood had serious limits on imagination.)

So I convinced The Powers That Be to give me a page for my directionless prattling, that would (I can only hope) somehow be tied to gaming. I've been duly informed that this is not a forum for my anti–Olsen-twins campaign. It's just that I hate them twisted little demons. They make me wanna pound and...okay, okay, I heard you. Quit pushing. Back to the point at hand.

We'll also be including other amusing items, such as our Talking Heads segment this month, the best of Net humor that's been assaulting our mailboxes, as well as cartoons (or modified screen grabs) submitted by our faithful readers. Send 'em in. If we use yours, you'll get a super-duper prize: something along the lines of a T-shirt, a free game, or a trip to Bali. (Of course, I'll need to run that last one by the accounting department again, but if "Hell no, moron!" means what I think it does, they're completely behind the idea.)

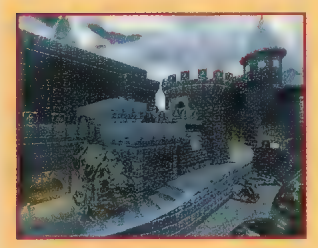
So fire your best email humor, drawings, cartoons, and other graphical guffaws (please zip first, and always zip up after) to ash@pcgames.com, or to Ash Backward, PC Games, 501 Second St. Suite 500, San Francisco CA 94107. If you've got comments, questions, praise, or remonstrances, keep them to yourself. Oh all right, send them.

Talking Heads: Daikatana Edition

You've probably all heard about the hubbub being stirred up deep in the heart of Texas at ION Storm. As we giddily wait for Daikatana's release (hey, it could still be good—yeah, and Thrill Kill's gonna be on our next demo disc), here are some quotes that let the insiders tell their story. For more skinny on the Riders on the Storm, check out our news piece in this issue.

"Hopefully, it's pretty realistic."

—John Romero, in a March 1997 interview posted on www.stormtroopers.com, *when asked if Daikatana's Christmas 1997 release date was feasible.*



Do or Daikatana?

"The sheer amount of content coupled with the Q2 tech integration delay added in with the fact that it just takes 18 months to do a game this size."

—Romero explaining why Daikatana's release was postponed to September 1998, in a March 1998 interview posted on www. stormtroopers. com.

"May 1999. By January 31 we'll have Episode 1. By the end of February we'll have Episode 2, etc."

—Eidos spokesperson Gary Keith, when asked for Daikatana's current estimated release date.

"I always say there is no tomorrow in game building. You can't get it done tomorrow because tomorrow s—loads is going to happen. So you get the job done and work in dinner. I'm easily the most nightmarish boss, and when I snap, I snap bad. General Patton said it best: 'I don't want these people to worship me, I want them to fight for me.'

—ION Storm CEO Todd Porter's reply to a "What kind of boss are you?" question during a 1998 GameSpot UK interview.

"It comes from the top. The powers that be love to assign numbers to something that is very difficult to predict."

—Porter in a 1998 GameSpot UK interview explaining sales-number predictions.

"We expect to sell 2.5 million units of Daikatana."

—Porter in an interview for the January 14–20, 1999 issue of the Dallas Observer.

"493,853."

—PC Data: Total Quake II sales through December 1998.

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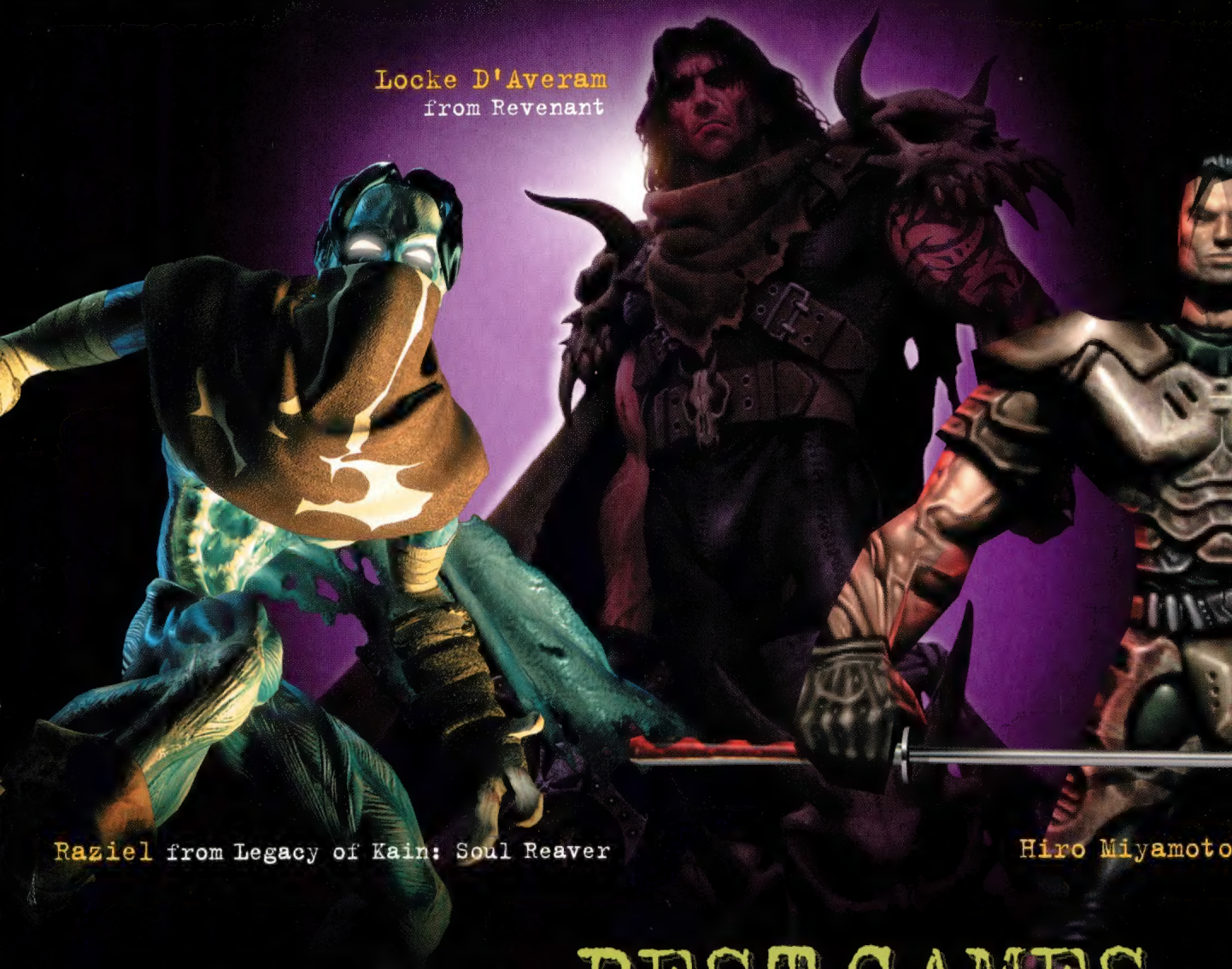

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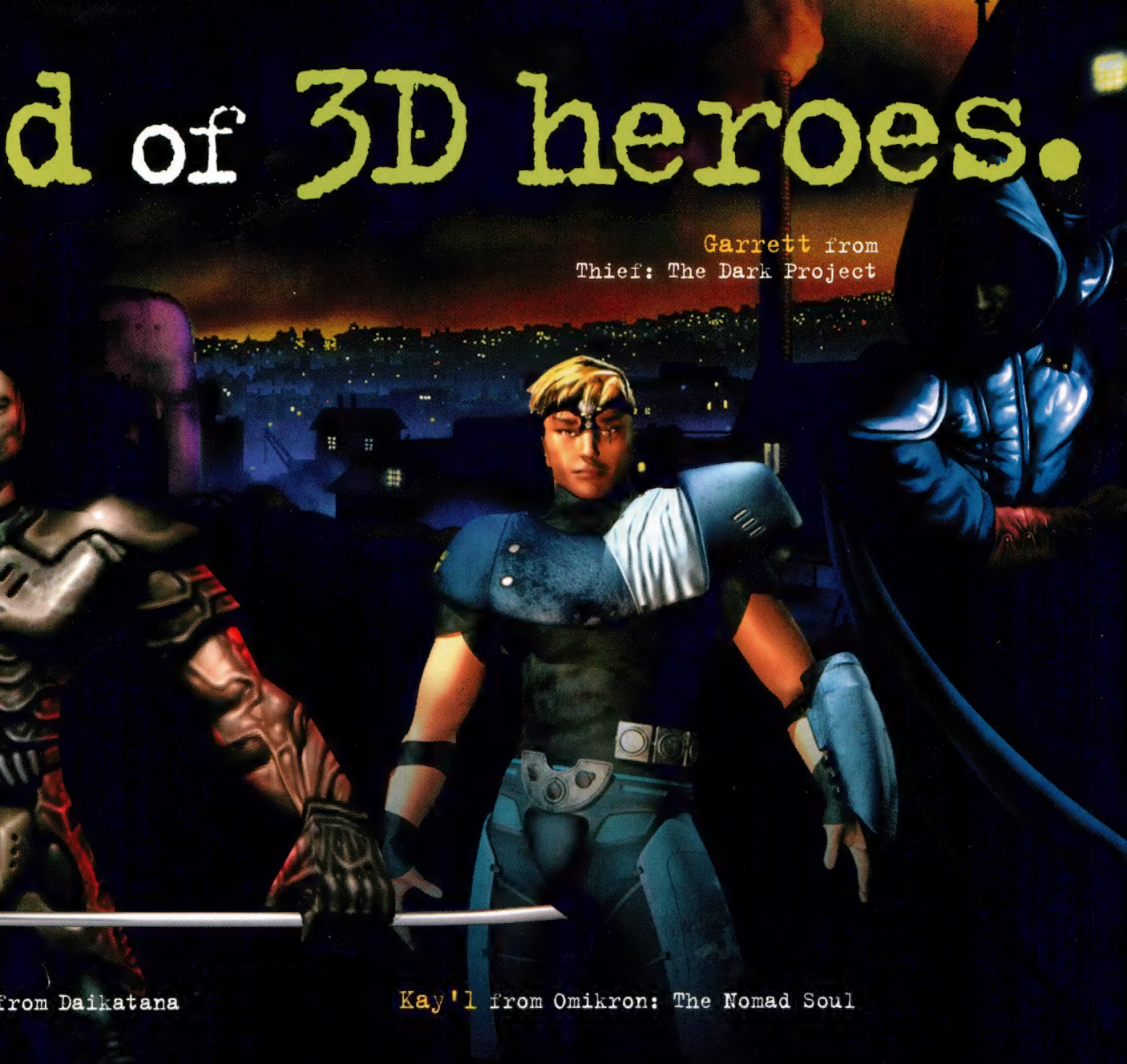

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